

## Frequently Asked Questions – Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

*The following PDF provides background information about avian influenza, including recent outbreaks, the viruses, and the risk to human health. This information comes directly from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and will be updated as new information becomes available.*

### *What is avian influenza (bird flu)?*

Avian influenza is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide, acting as reservoirs, carry a normally harmless form of influenza viruses in their intestines, and wild birds usually do not get sick from them. Unlike most avian influenza viruses, however, this new strain of H5N1 has caused mortality in more than 80 species of wild birds. Avian influenza can be very contagious among domestic poultry, and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them.

### *Do bird flu viruses infect humans?*

Avian influenza (bird flu) viruses do not usually infect humans, but a number of confirmed cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997, usually in persons who had close contact with infected poultry. One bird flu virus strain known as avian influenza A (H5N1) has been of particular concern in recent years.

The World Health Organization (WHO) maintains situation updates and cumulative reports of human cases of avian influenza A (H5N1). This information is available at <http://pandemicflu.gov/#map>. Additional information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/avian-flu-humans.htm>.

### *How do people become infected with bird flu viruses?*

Most cases of H5N1 avian influenza infection in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry (e.g., domesticated chicken, ducks, and turkeys) or surfaces possibly contaminated from feces of infected birds. For a pandemic of influenza to occur, avian influenza must mutate/change to be able to be passed easily from person to person. A pandemic of influenza can arise from changes that occur in certain kinds of highly pathogenic bird flu but no one knows when or even if this will happen. Today, there have been no reported cases of sustained human-to-human transmission of avian flu.

### *How does H5N1 virus differ from seasonal influenza viruses that infect human flu viruses?*

Unlike seasonal influenza, in which infection usually causes only mild respiratory symptoms in most people, H5N1 infection may follow an unusually aggressive clinical course, with rapid deterioration and high fatality. Primary viral pneumonia and multi-organ failure have been common among people who have become ill with H5N1 influenza. Of the few avian influenza viruses that have crossed the species barrier to infect humans, H5N1 virus has caused the largest number of reported cases of severe disease and death in humans. In the current situation in Asia, Europe, and Africa, more than half of the people infected with the virus have died. Most cases have occurred in previously healthy children and young adults.

### *What are the symptoms of bird flu in humans?*

People infected with the current strand of the avian virus (H5N1) have shown everything from typical human influenza-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases, and other life-threatening complications. Symptoms of avian influenza may depend on which specific virus subtype and strain caused the infection.