



Avian Influenza (The Bird Flu)



What Is It?

Avian influenza, more commonly known as the "bird flu", is caused by influenza A viruses that occur naturally among birds. It is a virus, not unlike the ones humans protect themselves from every year. Wild birds worldwide carry Avian Influenza viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. Avian Influenza is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them. Infected birds "shed" the influenza virus through their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Other birds become infected when they come in contact with one of these "shed" sources. Avian Influenza causes two main forms of disease: (1.) Low pathogenic forms, which cause mild symptoms in birds, such as ruffled feathers and a drop in egg production. (2.) High pathogenic forms, which spreads rapidly through poultry flocks, affecting multiple internal organs; causing death to the bird within 48 hours.

Can I Get It?

Yes, although it is extremely rare.

Transmission to Humans

Despite the widespread attention to the Avian Influenza, according to the World Health Organization, there are just over 200 known worldwide confirmed human cases since 2003. Transmission to human beings is extremely rare. Scientists are researching why some people, and not others, become infected following similar exposures to one of the viruses. **Note:** There is no evidence that Avian Influenza can be transmitted through properly cooked poultry and eggs.

Symptoms in Humans

The Avian Influenza is not a "one size fits all" virus. The different types of viruses and pathogenic forms cause varying symptoms. Symptoms range from typical, human flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress), and other severe and life-threatening complications. The symptoms of bird flu may depend on which virus caused the infection. If you believe you have come in contact with a contaminated bird and you are experiencing symptoms, don't wait - contact your doctor immediately.

What is Everyone Worried About?

An Outbreak! People are concerned about a new subtype of the virus that causes serious health risks and easily spreads among human beings. Currently, the Avian Influenza is not an epidemic (or outbreak). Awareness and education are the best ways to remain informed.

Simple Tips To Remember:

- 1.) Do not handle or eat sick wildlife.
- 2.) Thoroughly wash any item which may come in contact with a contaminated bird.
- 3.) Always wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 30 seconds.
- 4.) Cover your mouth when you cough and/or sneeze.



Websites for More Information

Additional information can be found at the following websites:

The American Red Cross
www.redcross.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
World Health Organization
www.who.int