

Environmental Health and Prevention Services

Avian Influenza (Bird flu)

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza is a form of influenza (flu) that infects wild and domestic birds. There are a number of varieties of Avian flu. Currently, southeast Asia is dealing with a rapidly spreading outbreak of an Avian virus (H5N1) that is infecting both poultry farms and wild birds.

Many affected countries are presently reducing domestic bird numbers to cut the risk of the virus spreading.

Can Humans get Avian Flu?

Avian flu viruses normally infect birds and potentially pigs. However, since 1997, on several occasions harmful bird flu viruses have been spread to humans. Currently, the spread of the virus to humans has been very limited. It appears to have occurred through contact with infected droppings, nasal or oral secretions, or other bodily fluids of infected poultry or wild birds.

These viruses are very new to humans, so the human immune system has not yet developed protection against it. Therefore any infection may be very severe. Current flu vaccines will not prevent these infections but may help to reduce the illness.

Since viruses mutate or change often, it is not possible to make a vaccine that will be effective against a new virus until an outbreak occurs. It may take as long as 4 to 6 months to make a vaccine that is effective against a new virus.

How is the Avian Virus Spread?

Close contact with:

- Infected wild birds, poultry and poultry products
- Contaminated clothing and footwear
- Contaminated vehicles and equipment
- Contaminated feed and water
- Virus in manure and litter
- Insects, rodents (mice, rats) and farm dogs/cats may carry and spread the infection.

How Can We Stop the Spread?

More outbreaks in birds increase the chance for people to get the virus. Several strains of Avian flu virus have been detected in Canada three times since 1975, but at low levels.

Avoid contact with live poultry.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has strict regulations on bringing birds and poultry products into Canada from other countries. When a serious outbreak occurs, plans are in place to control its spread into Canada. Getting rid of infected flocks is frequently used as a measure to control the virus.

What can Travellers Do?

Health Canada posts updates on its website frequently. Since the disease may be carried on clothing and footwear and in poultry products:

- Avoid unnecessary contact with live poultry (i.e. markets)
- Don't visit infected areas.

When returning to Canada you should:

- Declare all poultry products
- If you visited a farm while away, make sure clothing and shoes are free of dirt and manure.

Is it safe to eat Poultry?

Eating poultry in Canada is perfectly safe. But if you travel to Asia, it is especially important not to eat under-cooked poultry, raw eggs or runny eggs.

Protect you and Your Family

- Get a flu shot
- Wash hands often
- Stay home if sick.

Health Canada Website – Flu Watch:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/fluwatch/index.html>



**Community
Health Services
Department**

Your partners in good health!

160 Exmouth Street
Point Edward, Ontario N7T 7Z6
phone: (519) 383-8331
toll free: 1-800-667-1839
fax: (519) 383-7092
email: chsd@county-lambton.on.ca
www.lambtonhealth.on.ca