

What to Know About Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

What You Need to Know

- Avian influenza, also commonly called bird flu, is a viral infection of birds.
- Infected birds shed the virus in their mucous, saliva or feces. The virus can live for several weeks in the environment.
- While human infection is rare, people can be infected when exposed to infected birds.
- Avian influenza can cause serious illness in people.
- Currently, the virus is not known to spread from person to person.

Signs & Symptoms of Avian Influenza in Humans

- At first, the symptoms of bird flu can be the same as common influenza (flu) symptoms, such as:
 - fever (temperature of 37.8°C or greater) or feeling feverish/chills
 - cough
 - sore throat
 - muscle aches
 - difficulty breathing
 - headache
- Sometimes bird flu also can cause other symptoms, such as:
 - vomiting or diarrhea
 - red eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Bird flu can quickly progress to pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome, a serious lung problem that can be deadly.

Who is at risk of getting bird flu?

- You may be at greater risk of contracting avian influenza if you:
 - Have been in close or direct contact with live, sick, or dead poultry, or with wild birds; and
 - Are a poultry farmer who has infected birds.
- You cannot get bird flu from eating fully cooked poultry products, because heat kills the virus.
- Risk of human infection is very low provided appropriate precautions are taken during handling/disposal of affected animals/carcasses.

What to do if you are exposed to birds confirmed to be infected with this virus?

- Monitor for signs and symptoms for 10 days following the date of last exposure.
- If you develop any signs and symptoms, stay home and minimize contact with others. Notify your local public health office and care provider immediately.

How is it diagnosed?

- If your doctor thinks that you may have bird flu, he or she will do a physical examination and ask you questions about:
 - your symptoms,
 - your past health,
 - where you live,
 - where you have travelled recently, and
 - if you have been near any birds.
- Diagnosis may involve blood tests, nasal swabs, or other tests, such as X-rays.

Treatment

- Bird flu viruses can make people feel sicker than other kinds of influenza viruses.
- In some cases, antiviral medicines may be prescribed.
- Seeking treatment immediately and the use of antiviral medications can help to prevent the risk of serious illness and further complications.
- Severe illness may require hospitalization.

Protect Yourself and Others

- **Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds.** Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60-90% alcohol if hands are not visibly dirty and soap and water are not readily available.
- **Get the influenza vaccine annually.** Vaccines are available free of charge from your primary care provider or local pharmacist. It is recommended that people who work with birds receive an annual influenza vaccine.
- **Minimize the amount of time spent with birds or in contaminated environments.** Children younger than 5 years old, pregnant people, adults 65 and older, and with chronic health condition or weak immune systems are at a higher risk and should avoid contact with potentially infected poultry.
- **Follow Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) Directions.** Disposal of infected poultry and decontamination is conducted under the direction and supervision of a CFIA inspector.

Refer to CFIA materials for information.
<https://inspection.canada.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/backyard-flocks-and-pet-birds/eng/1323643634523/1323644740109>

Important Contact Information

For Information on Avian Influenza contact:
Canadian Food Inspection Agency

For information on human health issues related to Avian Influenza contact:

Your local Public Health Office:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/health/public-health/public-health-offices>

For Information on Disinfectants and Safe Work Practices:

Health Services, Occupational Health and Safety Division
Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
1-800-567-7233

For Mental Health support:

<https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA?lang=en-ca>
<http://www.farmstressline.ca/resources>