

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BIRD FLU

### WHAT IS “BIRD FLU” AND WHO IS AT RISK?

There are many types of influenza or “flu.”

- The type that currently has health officials worried is H5N1.
- This disease affects mostly birds.
- Millions of birds have either died of the disease or been killed to control its spread.

### ARE THERE OTHER NAMES FOR BIRD FLU?

Yes. It is also called avian influenza, avian flu, and H5N1.

### WHEN DID H5N1 BIRD FLU BECOME A PROBLEM FOR HUMANS?

- The first human case occurred in 1997 in Hong Kong.
- Since 2003, human cases and deaths from bird flu have been increasing.
- To date, no human cases of bird flu have occurred in the U.S.

### IS THERE A VACCINE FOR H5N1 BIRD FLU?

Health officials in the U.S. are gearing up for the first human tests of an H5N1 vaccine. Systems are in place for rapidly sharing disease alerts.

### WHY DO SCIENTISTS HAVE TO DEVELOP A COMPLETELY NEW VACCINE FOR H5N1 BIRD FLU?

- H5N1 is a totally new virus to humans.
- This virus is not like other flu viruses that current flu vaccines target.
- The H5N1 virus is so dangerous that scientists working on vaccines must follow very strict safety rules.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

KY Cabinet for Health and Family Services  
Frankfort, KY

<http://healthalerts.ky.gov>

KY Regional Poison Center Louisville, KY

**EMERGENCY: 1-800-222-1222**

<http://www.krpc.com/>

Lake Cumberland District Health Dept.

(606) 678 – 4761

The Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention (CDC) Atlanta, GA

**Toll free: 1-800-311-3435**

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/>

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BIRD FLU**

### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ANTIVIRAL MEDICINES IN TREATING BIRD FLU?**

- Antiviral medicines are used mainly to lessen the severity of influenza symptoms and make people less contagious.
- Antiviral medicines are most useful if given soon after symptoms begin.
- Antiviral medicines may be used to reduce the spread of flu among those exposed to the disease.
  - Antiviral medicines may be given to those in close contact with influenza patients.
  - Close contacts could include family members and health care workers.
  - Antiviral medicines may be given to those who have traveled, or who have worked or lived with an infected person.

### **HAS BIRD FLU BEEN FOUND IN POULTRY IN THE UNITED STATES?**

**Bird flu has been detected in poultry from time to time in the U. S. through routine testing.**

- In February 2004, there was a bird flu (H5N2) outbreak in a flock of chickens in Texas.
- In February and March 2004, less severe outbreaks of bird flu occurred in Pennsylvania (H2N2), Delaware (H7N2), New Jersey (H7N2), and Maryland (H7N2).

### **WHAT IS THE RISK TO PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES FROM THE RECENT H5N1 BIRD FLU OUTBREAKS?**

**The current risk to Americans from the H5N1 bird flu outbreaks in other countries is low.**

- The H5N1 virus found in recent outbreaks in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East has not been found in the U.S.
- There have been no human cases of H5N1 in the U.S.
- It is possible that travelers returning from affected countries could be infected.

***SINCE FEBRUARY 2004, MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN WATCHING CLOSELY TO FIND ANY SUCH CASES OF BIRD FLU.***

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BIRD FLU

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BIRD FLU AND PANDEMIC FLU?

Influenza pandemics have occurred when a new virus emerged from a blend of human and bird virus strains.

- The most recent pandemics were in 1957 and in 1968.
- A pandemic can happen only when the new virus is contagious among humans.
- To find out which strains might become a pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) carry out regular monitoring.

### IS IT SAFE TO EAT CHICKEN OR OTHER POULTRY?

Poultry products brought into the U.S. must meet the same safety standards as foods produced in the U.S.

- Eating poultry that has been properly handled and cooked is safe.
- If H5N1 bird flu were in the U.S., the chance of infected poultry entering the human food chain would be very low.
- Even if it did, proper cooking kills this virus just as it does many other germs.

*POULTRY PRODUCTS BROUGHT INTO THE U.S. MUST MEET THE SAME SAFETY STANDARDS AS FOODS PRODUCED IN THE U.S.*

### WHAT STEPS HAS THE CDC TAKEN TO PROTECT THE U.S. AGAINST IMPORTATION OF BIRD FLU?

- Since February 4, 2004, the CDC has banned the import of all birds from countries with bird flu outbreaks.
- The CDC issues these bans to protect the health and safety of U.S. citizens.
- Currently the CDC bans the import of birds from the following countries: **[insert country names listed from the following Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/embargo.htm>].**

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### WILL HEAT KILL THE BIRD FLU VIRUS?

**Cooked poultry is safe to eat if the meat is handled properly throughout preparation. The following guidance is recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):**

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other foods.
- After cutting raw meats, wash cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
- Clean cutting boards with a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.
- Use a food thermometer to make sure all parts of the bird have reached a safe temperature.
- Poultry meat should reach at least **165° F (70° C)** to kill germs, including bird flu viruses.
- All foods from poultry should be cooked thoroughly, including eggs. Egg yolks should not be runny.
- Do not use raw or soft-boiled eggs in foods that will not be cooked.
- After handling eggs, wash your hands and all surfaces and utensils with soap and water.

***CALL THE USDA MEAT AND POULTRY HOTLINE AT 1-888-674-6854 FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SAFE FOOD PREPARATION***

### WHAT KIND OF SURVEILLANCE IS IN PLACE NOW FOR H5N1 BIRD FLU?

**The WHO has partner laboratories that test humans and birds around the world for bird flu. If any tests are positive, the following measures will be taken:**

- The WHO will be notified.
- The CDC will be notified.
- The Kentucky Department for Public Health will be notified.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BIRD FLU**

### **HOW DOES BIRD FLU SPREAD FROM BIRDS TO HUMANS?**

**Almost all human cases have been traced back to very close contact with infected poultry.**

### **WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BIRD FLU?**

- In humans, symptoms may include the usual flu-like symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches.
- Some people may get eye infections, pneumonia, and severe breathing problems.
- It is possible to have severe and life-threatening complications as a result of bird flu.

### **WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO PREVENT GETTING BIRD FLU?**

**The same steps you take to prevent the common cold apply when trying to prevent bird flu. The following are some general steps a family can take:**

- Wash hands often with soap and water or waterless, alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Cover the nose and mouth with a handkerchief or tissue when sneezing or coughing.
- Avoid touching the eyes, mouth, and nose, especially when coughing or sneezing.
- Keep children home from school, daycare or other social gatherings if they are sick.
- Stay home from work or other public settings if you are sick.
- Avoid crowded places where people are confined in an indoor space.

### **IF PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO BIRD FLU, WHAT SHOULD THEY DO?**

**People who have been exposed to bird flu should do the following:**

- Monitor their health for 10 days.
- If they have a fever, difficulty breathing, a cough, or any illness during this period, they should talk with a health care provider.
- Before visiting a health care setting, tell the provider about your symptoms and that you may have been exposed to bird flu.
- Do not travel while sick, and limit your contact with others as much as possible to help prevent the spread of illness.

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### IS BIRD FLU A THREAT TO HEALTHY ADULTS?

**In most flu epidemics or pandemics, the sick and the elderly are most likely to get the flu. This is because they are less able to fight off infections.**

- In other countries, healthy adults and youth have been infected with bird flu.
- The average age of those infected has been in the range of 17 to 31 years.
- Younger adults may be getting infected because they are the ones most often selling birds in markets or killing birds for food.

### SHOULD TRAVELERS TO AREAS WITH BIRD FLU OUTBREAKS BE CONCERNED ABOUT CATCHING BIRD FLU?

- Travelers should check with the CDC for the most recent information about the risk of getting bird flu in a given country.
- The CDC issues *Travel Health Precautions* that tell travelers steps to take before, during and after travel.
- At present, the CDC **has not** advised the general public to avoid travel to countries affected by bird flu. The most up-to-date guidance for travelers can be found at: [http://www.cdc.gov/travel/other/avian\\_influenza\\_se\\_asia\\_2005.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/other/avian_influenza_se_asia_2005.htm)

### WHAT GENERAL PRECAUTIONS SHOULD TRAVELERS TAKE?

**The following guidance is based on experiences to date. It may be revised as more information becomes available. See the Web site above for more information.**

- Observe precautions to safeguard your health.
  - Avoid settings where bird flu is most common, e.g., bird markets and poultry yards.
  - Be aware that live poultry are often in homes and yards.
  - Make sure that any poultry dishes you eat are well-cooked.
- One of the best preventive practices is careful and frequent hand washing.
  - Washing hands often removes germs from skin and helps prevent the spread of disease.
  - When washing hands, use soap and water or a waterless, alcohol-based hand rub.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BIRD FLU**

### **WILL THE VIRUS SPREAD TO THE UNITED STATES?**

**It is likely that bird flu will spread to the U.S. There are several ways bird flu could reach North America:**

- **Wild bird migration:** Scientists believe bird flu would probably appear first in Alaska if it spreads to the U.S. by migrating birds. The Department of Interior (DOI) has increased monitoring and testing of migratory birds, especially in Alaska.
- **Smuggling of birds or poultry products:** The USDA has increased monitoring for smuggled poultry and poultry products.
- **Travel by infected people:** People traveling in areas where bird flu already exists could bring it here. The CDC provides guidance and screening for travelers to regions affected by bird flu.

### **WHAT EARLY SIGNS MIGHT WE SEE IF BIRD FLU IS IN THE UNITED STATES?**

**The first sign may be birds that are dying for no obvious reason.**

### **WHAT TYPES OF BIRDS CAN SPREAD THE FLU?**

**Bird flu viruses are more common in water birds like ducks, geese, shorebirds, and gulls. Some types of birds, such as pigeons, are not easily infected.**

### **DO WE KNOW HOW LONG THE VIRUS CAN LIVE ON FEATHERS, IN WATER, OR ON SURFACES?**

**Flu viruses can survive for a long time outside of a host.**

- Bird flu viruses can survive in bird droppings or standing water for almost a week at room temperature. They can survive up to three weeks in the cold.
- Heat will kill the virus. The temperature should be at least **165 degrees F.**
- Simple soap and water, as well as many disinfectants and commercial cleaners, will kill the virus.

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### **DOES OWNING A CAGED PET BIRD INCREASE THE RISK OF PASSING OR CATCHING THE BIRD FLU VIRUS?**

**Having a pet bird that is indoors all the time is not likely to be a risk.**

### **IF MY PET PICKS UP A BIRD THAT DIED FROM BIRD FLU, COULD MY PET GET BIRD FLU?**

**The risk of a pet becoming infected with bird flu is very low.**

- So far, there have been only a few confirmed cases of dogs infected with bird flu.
- While it is not easy for a cat to become infected, there is evidence that cats can get bird flu. They can also pass the disease to other cats.
- A small number of domestic cats, tigers, and panthers have died from bird flu.

***TO DATE, NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN INFECTED WITH BIRD FLU FROM A PET.***

### **CAN MOSQUITOES SPREAD BIRD FLU?**

**No. Mosquitoes cannot spread bird flu.**

### **IS THE MEDIA OVERSTATING THE POTENTIAL DANGER OF BIRD FLU?**

- Bird flu is a clear danger to poultry.
- Its threat to wild birds is real.
- The number of human cases has been small so far, but the potential for a more serious threat to humans is also real.
- It is possible to have severe and life-threatening complications as a result of bird flu.

***A HEIGHTENED LEVEL OF PUBLIC AWARENESS, INCLUDING MEDIA COVERAGE, IS APPROPRIATE TO THE RISK.***