



Pandemic Influenza (Flu) Avian Flu

What is pandemic influenza (flu)?

Pandemic flu is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza 'A' virus appears or emerges in the human population, causes serious illness, and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide.

Is pandemic flu different than the annual flu outbreaks (epidemics)?

Yes. Pandemic flu is different from seasonal outbreaks or "epidemics" of flu. Seasonal outbreaks are caused by subtypes of flu viruses that already circulate among people, whereas pandemic outbreaks are caused by new subtypes or subtypes that have not circulated for a long time.

When is a flu pandemic expected?

Flu pandemics occur naturally. There were three pandemics in the 20th century and one in the 21st century (H1N1). Past flu pandemics have led to high levels of illness, death, social disruption and economic loss. It is not possible to predict accurately when flu pandemics will occur or how severe they will be. However, flu experts are concerned that a pandemic is developing that may be severe.

What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and even cause death. The influenza A virus is also referred to as the "H5N1 virus."

Media reports use the terms avian influenza and H5N1 terms interchangeably.

Is it possible for the avian flu to become a pandemic flu?

The avian H5N1 virus is a strain with pandemic potential, since it could ultimately adapt into a strain that is contagious among humans. Once this adaptation occurs, it will no longer be a bird virus; it will become a human flu virus.

How does Avian (bird) flu spread?

Bird flu is spread by infected birds that shed flu virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions.

How do people become infected with the avian flu virus?

The main route of human infection is through direct contact with infected poultry, or surfaces and objects contaminated by the poultry's feces. To date, most human cases have occurred in rural areas where many households keep small poultry flocks, which often roam freely, sometimes entering homes or sharing outdoor areas where children play.

What are the symptoms of avian flu in humans?

The reported symptoms have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections (conjunctivitis), pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia, and other severe and life-threatening complications.



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What should I do if I have these symptoms?

See your healthcare provider immediately if you develop flu symptoms, including a fever, cough, and body aches, AND have recently traveled to a part of the world where avian flu has been reported (Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa and Iraq). Be sure to let your doctor know when and where you were traveling and whether you visited any farms or open-air markets. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for travel health information: www.cdc.gov/travel.

What is the risk to the United States from the avian flu outbreak in Asia and Europe?

The current risk to Americans from the avian flu outbreak is low. The strain of avian flu found overseas has not been detected in the U.S. and there have been no human cases of avian flu in the U.S. It is possible that travelers returning from affected countries in Asia could be infected if they were exposed to the virus.

What can I do now to reduce the risk of illness?

By practicing good hygiene habits, you can help stop germs from spreading.

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing
- Wash your hands often
- Stay home when you are sick
- Keep hands away from your mouth and nose
- Do all you can to improve your health. The healthier you are, the more resistant your body is to disease. It's a better time than ever to quit smoking, improve your eating habits, exercise regularly, and get regular medical checkups and recommended vaccinations.

Is the Sedgwick County Health Department prepared to respond to a pandemic influenza?

The Sedgwick County Health Department works frequently with federal, state and other local agencies to prepare for potential pandemic influenza and maintain essential health care and community services for its citizens should a pandemic flu occur.

For more information:

Sedgwick County Health Department

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