



# Avian Flu Fact Sheet

## What is avian flu?

Avian (bird) flu is a virus that infects birds, mainly poultry (chicken, turkey and ducks), but also wild birds. It has been found among poultry in Asia in the last several years. Over one hundred people have contracted avian flu in Asia and have become seriously ill. Almost all of these people had direct contact with infected poultry. About half of the ill have died.

Avian flu is different from the common flu that occurs every year in our community. Common flu is spread from person-to-person. It is a significant illness that can result in hospitalization and even death in elderly people and people with ongoing medical problems. However, most people who get common flu will recover on their own in several days.

## Why are we concerned about avian flu?

Health officials have closely monitored cases of avian flu in Asia. Very recently, the disease has spread to birds in parts of Eastern Europe and Britain which raises concerns that it could continue to spread worldwide.

Avian flu is easily spread from bird-to-bird. Some humans have become infected by handling infected birds. Right now, avian flu does not spread easily among humans. Health officials are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread more easily and widely from person-to-person.

## Can I get avian flu in Oregon?

At this time, there is little risk of getting avian flu in Oregon or the United States. **No cases have been detected in birds or humans in the U.S.** Poultry sold to eat in the U.S. is strictly regulated by the U.S.D.A. and properly cooking poultry kills viruses such as the avian flu. Also, remember that the regular flu season is starting, so talk with your health care provider about getting your annual flu shot.

## Is there a vaccine to protect humans from avian flu?

There is currently no vaccine to protect humans against the virus. However, researchers are working to develop a vaccine and determine the effectiveness of a number of antiviral medications. Antiviral medications can be used to treat flu caused by this virus, and might also have a limited role in preventing the illness.

## What are health officials doing to prepare?

Public health, hospital systems, and private providers in the region have been working together to plan for emergencies, including large outbreaks of contagious disease such as avian flu. Hundreds of volunteer health care professionals can be mobilized if needed.

## **I keep poultry. How can I protect my birds from disease?**

Keeping your birds healthy is a top priority for bird owners. Birds can become sick or die from exposure to a number of bacteria, viruses, or parasites. The following tips from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Veterinary Services office will help decrease the risk of disease entering your flock:

- Keep your distance: consider fencing off the area where your birds are to form a barrier between “clean” and “dirty” areas. Restrict access to caretakers only.
- Keep it clean: keep a pair of shoes and clothes to wear only around your birds. Clean and disinfect your shoes and clothing to remove droppings and debris. Clean and disinfect cages and equipment that comes into contact with your birds or their droppings
- Don’t haul disease home: if you travel to a location where other birds are present, be sure to clean and disinfect car and truck tires, poultry cages, and other equipment before your return to your property.
- Don’t borrow disease from your neighbor: do not share poultry equipment or tools with other bird owners. Never share wooden pallets or cardboard egg cartons because they can not be adequately cleaned and disinfected.
- Know the warning signs of infectious bird diseases: early detection is important to prevent the spread of disease. Look for sudden increases in bird deaths in your flock; respiratory problems, diarrhea, lack of energy, and poor appetite among your birds; drop in egg production, unusual swelling or discoloration of wattles, combs and legs; tremors or other unusual movements.
- Report sick birds: Call the USDA toll-free hotline ( 1-866-536-7593) for more information.

## **Should I report dead birds to local authorities?**

At this time, public health authorities are asking only for reports of dead corvids (blue jays and crows) and raptors for the purpose of detecting West Nile virus. There is no need to report other wild dead birds to local or state health authorities, however, if you keep flocks of poultry, contact your veterinarian if you see unusual signs of disease or unexpected deaths among your birds. USDA operates a toll-free hotline (1-866-536-7593) with veterinarians to help you.

## **What can I do to protect myself against the common flu?**

Practicing good health habits and maintaining a healthy immune system is the best defense against any type of flu. This includes quitting smoking, eating healthy food, regular exercise, getting medical checkups and recommended immunizations. A flu shot will help protect you from the common flu. You can reduce the spread of flu by:

- Washing your hands frequently to reduce the chance of infection.
- Covering your mouth while sneezing or coughing.
- Getting a flu shot
- Staying home if you’re sick so others are not exposed.

More information about the flu is available through the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) at [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)