

# Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) Frequently Asked Questions

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## **What is Avian (Bird) Influenza (Flu)?**

Avian influenza, or “bird flu”, is a contagious disease caused by viruses that normally infect birds and, less commonly, pigs. Avian influenza viruses are highly species-specific, but have, on rare occasions, crossed the species barrier to infect humans. Undomesticated (wild) birds carry the viruses in their intestines and spread it to domesticated birds. The viruses often do not harm the wild birds but are highly contagious and lethal to domesticated birds like chickens, ducks and turkeys.

## **Does the virus spread easily from birds to humans?**

No. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, even though we know they can. Though more than 100 human cases have occurred in the current outbreak, this is a small number compared with the huge number of birds affected and the numerous associated opportunities for human exposure. Several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

## **History of Avian Influenza**

Here is a list of several widespread outbreaks:

### ***1997 – H5N1, Hong Kong***

This was the first time an avian flu virus was found to transmit directly from birds to humans. During the outbreak, 18 people were hospitalized and six died. To control the outbreak, authorities killed about 1.5 million chickens to remove the source of the virus. Scientists determined that the virus spread primarily from birds to humans, though rare person-to-person infection was noted.

### ***1999 – H9N2, China & Hong Kong***

Avian influenza A (H9N2) illness was confirmed in two Hong Kong children. Both children recovered, and no additional cases were confirmed. The evidence suggested that poultry was the source of infection. The main mode of transmission was from bird to human. Several additional human H9N2 infections were reported from China in 1998-99.

***2003 – H7N7, Netherlands***

The Netherlands reported 89 people were confirmed to have H7N7 influenza virus infection associated with poultry outbreak. These cases occurred mostly among poultry workers. There was one death among the 89 total cases. The majority of these cases occurred as a result of direct contact with infected poultry.

***2004 – H5N1, Thailand and Vietnam***

In January 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported outbreaks of highly pathogenic Influenza A (H5N1) in Asia. From December 30, 2003, to March 17, 2004, 35 confirmed human cases of avian Influenza A (H5N1) were reported in Thailand and Vietnam, resulting in a total of 23 deaths.

***2004 and 2005 – H5N1, Thailand and Vietnam***

In June 2004, several Asian countries reported lethal outbreaks of H5N1 among poultry workers. So far, the virus has infected 117 people, killing 60 of them. Most people have been infected through close contact with infected poultry. In rare cases, the virus is believed to have spread from one member of a family to others through close contact.

***2005 – H5N1, Croatia and United Kingdom***

In October 2005 Britain and Croatia confirmed cases of bird flu. In Croatia, bird flu was confirmed in six swans found dead in a national park. British officials said that a parrot that had been imported from South America died of bird flu while in quarantine.

***2005 – H5N1, Canada***

In October 2005 it was reported that ducks in Ontario Canada were confirmed to be carrying the H5N1 virus.

**How are bird flu viruses different than human flu viruses?**

Bird flu viruses are Influenza A viruses that are chiefly found in birds. They primarily spread from bird-to-bird or bird-to-human. They do not readily spread from human-to-human. Human viruses are Influenza A viruses that readily spread human-to-human.

**What are the symptoms of the bird flu in humans?**

Bird flu symptoms in humans range from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress), and other severe and life-threatening complications.

**How does the bird flu spread?**

Infected birds spread flu virus in their feces, saliva and nasal secretions. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions. It is believed that most cases of bird flu infection in humans have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. The spread of avian influenza viruses from one ill person to another has been reported very rarely, and transmission has not been observed to continue beyond one person.

### **What is the risk of bird flu to humans?**

The risk of bird flu to humans is generally low because the viruses occur mainly among birds and do not usually infect humans. People with the highest risk are those who have contact with infected birds or surfaces that have been contaminated with excretions from infected birds. So far, spread of H5N1 virus from person to person has been rare and has not continued beyond one person.

### **What about a pandemic risk?**

There are three primary conditions necessary for pandemic:

1. Emergence of a new influenza virus subtype
2. New virus will infect humans and cause serious illness
3. Efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus

The H5N1 virus meets the first two conditions. The virus currently has not established efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission. It is feared that the virus may go through a gradual process of adaptive mutation resulting in viable human-to-human transmission.

### **Are there any disinfectants registered against Avian Influenza A?**

Coastwide Hepastat 256, Saniquat 512 and SE66 Disinfectant have been approved against Avian Influenza A. This is not the H5N1 strain, however it is believed that once the CDC releases the H5N1 strain for testing that these disinfectants will be effective against it.

Currently, CDC has not released the Avian Influenza A (H5N1 strain) for testing. CDC must obtain clearance from FDA before it will release the organism for testing. FDA is being very cautious with the organism and has not indicated when or if they will release it to testing facilities. However, it is believed that EPA registered quaternary based disinfectants should be effective against all strains of Avian Influenza A.

### **How can facilities managers and executive housekeepers protect their custodians and cleaning professionals against exposure to Avian Influenza A Viruses?**

- Continue to conduct normal cleaning and disinfecting activities inside buildings.
- Clean and disinfect environmental surfaces (floors, counters, toilets, urinals, walls, sinks etc.) with disinfectants that are effective against a broad spectrum of pathogenic microorganisms including *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Streptococcus faecalis*, *Pseudomonas aeruginos*, *Influenza A Viruses*, *Hepatitis B Virus (HBV)* and *HIV*.

## **What is the single most important thing that cleaning professionals can do to prevent the spread of disease?**

Public health officials indicate that frequent and proper hand washing is the single most important way to prevent the spread of disease. Though washing our hands may not protect us against direct contact with airborne particles, it will prevent the spread of germs through cross contamination to other surfaces and people that we touch.

## **Will antibacterial hand soaps protect us from the *Avian Influenza*?**

FDA says it found no medical studies that showed a link between specific consumer antibacterial hand soap and a decline in infection rates. In fact, one major study, according to FDA, found little difference between washing hands with soap and using antibacterial hand soaps.

FDA also raised concerns about the potential negative environmental impact of some antibacterial cleansers, which may harm some fish and breakdown into harmful contaminants.

Another potential concern recognized by FDA was the harm of using too many antibacterial products preventing people from being exposed to routine bacteria weakening the development of their immune systems and leading to asthma or allergies.

## **Should cleaning professionals wear gloves while cleaning a facility?**

It is a good practice to always wear appropriate gloves when cleaning. The gloves will act as a barrier from direct contact of pathogenic microorganisms to your hands.

Here are several important guidelines when using rubber gloves.

- Wear gloves at all times when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces.
- Wash gloves while still on your hands before removing them.
- Remove gloves prior to leaving work area and place them in designated area for storage, washing, decontamination or disposal.
- Replace single use disposable gloves as soon as feasible when contaminated or punctured and when task is completed.
- Do not wash or decontaminate disposable gloves for reuse.
- Decontaminate non-disposable gloves if intact.
- Immediately discard gloves when cracked, peeled, torn, punctured, or show signs of deterioration.

## **Where can I find additional information on Avian Influenza?**

The CDC has additional information on bird flu on their website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or you can call them at 800-311-3435. If you have any further questions concerning Avian Influenza A viruses and our registered disinfectants please feel free to contact us at [www.coastwidelabs.com](http://www.coastwidelabs.com).