

**The Disease**

Avian influenza, also called bird flu, is different from seasonal flu. Bird flu is caused by a virus that occurs naturally in wild birds. Wild birds usually don't get sick from the virus, but they can pass it on to domesticated birds like chickens, turkeys and ducks, which can get very sick and die.

Bird flu viruses and human flu viruses are similar, but they are not exactly the same. Bird flu viruses mainly infect birds. They do not usually infect humans. But over time, bird flu viruses could change and spread among humans. Public health officials are concerned that the bird flu virus known as H5N1 could one day be able to infect humans and spread easily from person to person.

The first case of human infection with H5N1 was reported in 1997. Since then, several hundred human cases have been reported in Asia and Africa. Deaths occurred among more than half of people whose cases were confirmed in the laboratory. To date, there have been no human cases of H5N1 reported in the U.S.

Bird flu is spread when infected birds shed the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and droppings. Public health officials believe people were infected with H5N1 after they had contact with these bodily fluids, or surfaces contaminated with these fluids. There is no danger from eating poultry or eggs, as long as they are fully cooked.

Outbreaks of H5N1 in birds have occurred in Asia, Africa and Europe. Experts around the world are watching the bird flu situation carefully and are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread from person to person.

**Symptoms of Avian Flu**

Bird flu can cause flu-like symptoms in humans, such as fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches. Symptoms may also include eye infection, pneumonia and severe breathing problems, possibly leading to death. Up to 10 days may pass between being exposed to the virus and developing these symptoms.



## **Diagnosis**

Your healthcare provider can perform a test for seasonal influenza. If this test is positive, other testing can be done to determine the specific influenza strain, including bird flu.

## **Treatment**

People who are infected with bird flu can become very sick. Treatment may include hospitalization, supportive care and/or the use of drugs known as antivirals. In order for antivirals to be effective they must be started within 48 hours of symptom onset. There is currently no vaccine to prevent avian influenza in humans, but research and testing are ongoing. Antibiotics are not effective against the flu.

## **Reducing Your Risk**

When you plan to travel abroad, check [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), the website for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). You can also call their hotline at 1-888-246-2675 for the latest travel advice.

If you plan to travel to countries with known outbreaks of avian influenza, avoid poultry farms, contact with live animals in live food markets and any surfaces suspected to be contaminated with bird or animal droppings.

Consult your healthcare provider if you develop symptoms of avian flu. Tell your healthcare provider if you have traveled to an area where bird flu has been reported.

## **For More Information**

Talk to your healthcare provider

Visit the DHSS website at [www.nj.gov/health/flu](http://www.nj.gov/health/flu) and [www.njflupandemic.gov](http://www.njflupandemic.gov)

Call the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) Communicable Disease Service at 609-588-7500

Visit [www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/) or call the CDC toll-free at 1-800-CDC-INFO (4636) for assistance in English and Spanish (TTY 1-888-232-6348)

E-mail the CDC at [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov).