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Featured Article

Avian Flu

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There is growing world and nationwide concern about the potential for an Avian flu epidemic which might become transmissible from person to person. Sooner or later such a flu will come. There is at this time no vaccine for humans which would be effective in preventing a human to human variety of this disease. There are antiviral medicines which could reduce the level of illness, but these medicines are in very short supply world-wide.

In an epidemic for which there is no available prevention or treatment, the best chance of protecting people is to avoid catching (and spreading) the disease. The common cold and yearly winter flu outbreaks are good models for practicing how to control a more deadly flu if it were to arise. The same personal behaviors affect the spread of colds, common flu, and deadly epidemic flu. If we all begin practicing behaviors which help us to avoid catching and spreading colds and common flu, we will be getting ready for at least some control of a deadly flu.

You get infected with flu in two ways, by breathing in the virus and by putting the virus in your eyes, nose, or mouth with your hands. So how do we avoid catching it? By not breathing in the infected droplets that someone coughs into the air, and by

not putting it in our eyes, nose, or mouth with our unwashed hands.

Not getting it on your hands is impossible. Millions of viruses are on the many objects you touch which were recently contaminated by the hands of others who were infected with the virus.

- People should wash or sanitize their hands right before touching food or putting fingers in their eyes, nose, or mouth for any reason. Touch nothing in between.
- People should avoid breathing where others have recently coughed or sneezed.
- Sick people with fever or cough should stay home and stay away from others.

The formal public health terms for controlling spread of a disease are isolation or quarantine. Isolation refers to keeping a sick person away from others. Ideally this would occur in a special room in a hospital. But in an epidemic there would not be enough such rooms. So, staying home would be the next best way to isolate a sick person.

Quarantine refers to keeping potentially infected people away from others. People who may be incubating a disease may not show it for several days. In the case of flu, the incubation period from exposure to disease is often rapid – two to three days.

In an epidemic, we will depend heavily on individuals, families, neighbors, work mates, and all citizens to know that stopping an epidemic depends on keeping it from spreading. We each do our part by trying not to catch it and being sure not to spread it if we know we are sick.



Upcoming Issue: Tornado Drill Update

Travel Tips for International Travel into Areas Affected by H5N1 Avian Influenza

Information taken from article on website:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Infectious Diseases - February 17, 2006

Before any international travel to an affected area

- Visit CDC's Travelers' Health website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel> to educate yourself and others who may be traveling with you about any disease risks and CDC health recommendations for international travel in areas you plan to visit. For other information about avian influenza, see CDC's Avian Influenza website at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>.
- Be sure you are up to date with all your routine vaccinations, see your doctor or health-care provider, ideally 4–6 weeks before travel, to receive any additional vaccinations, medications, or information you may need.
- Identify in-country health-care resources in advance of your trip.
- Check to see if your health insurance plan includes medical evacuation coverage in case you become sick and need to return home while traveling. If your plan does not provide such coverage, consider purchasing supplemental insurance. Information about medical evacuation services is provided on the U.S. Department of State web page Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad, at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html.

During travel to an affected area

- Avoid all direct contact with poultry, including touching well-appearing, sick, or dead chickens, ducks, and other birds. Avoid places where live poultry are raised or kept, such as poultry farms and bird markets, and avoid handling surfaces contaminated with poultry feces or secretions.
- As with other infectious illnesses, one of the most important preventive practices is careful and frequent handwashing. Cleaning your hands often with soap and water removes potentially infectious material from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission. Waterless, alcohol-based hand gels may be used when soap is not available and hands are not visibly soiled.
- Influenza viruses are destroyed by heat; therefore, as a precaution, any poultry product intended for consumption, including eggs and poultry blood, should be thoroughly cooked.

- If you become sick with symptoms such as a fever accompanied by a cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing or if you develop any illness that requires prompt medical attention, a U.S. consular officer can assist you in locating medical services and informing your family or friends. Inform your health-care provider of any possible exposures to avian influenza. See [Seeking Health Care Abroad](#) in *Health Information for International Travel* for more information about what to do if you become ill while abroad. You should defer further travel until you are free of symptoms, unless you travel locally for health care.

Note: Some countries have instituted health monitoring, such as temperature screenings, at ports of entry for travelers arriving from areas affected by avian influenza. Please consult the embassy of your travel destination country if you have any questions.

After your return from an affected area

- Monitor your health for 10 days.
- If you become ill with a fever plus a cough, sore throat, or trouble breathing during this 10-day period, consult a health-care provider. *Before you visit a health-care setting, tell the provider the following: 1) your symptoms, 2) where you traveled, and 3) if you have had direct contact with poultry or close contact with a severely ill person. This way, he or she can be aware that you have traveled to an area reporting avian influenza.*
- Do not travel while ill, unless you are seeking medical care. Limiting contact with others as much as possible can help prevent the spread of an infectious illness.

For more information about the influenza situation in Turkey, see

http://www.who.int/csr/don/2006_01_07/en/index.html.

For more information about H5N1 infections in humans, visit the World Health Organization avian influenza website at

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/ and the CDC Avian Influenza site at

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>.

For information about CDC recommendations for enhanced surveillance, diagnostic evaluation, and infection control precautions for H5N1, see

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/professional/updates.htm>.

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