

**What is Avian or Bird Flu?**

Avian influenza (“bird flu”) occurs naturally in birds. Wild birds carry the virus, but usually do not get sick. Wild birds can spread avian influenza to domesticated birds (chickens, ducks, and turkeys) and other animals which become sick and often die. Although rare, a person can become infected with avian influenza.

**Where has bird flu been found?**

One type of bird flu, Avian H5N1, has been in the news for infecting birds, other animals and people in Asia and parts of Europe and Africa. Since the 1990s, H5N1 has spread in birds and other animals in new regions of the world. Most human cases came from direct contact with infected birds or their droppings. Several hundred people have gotten bird flu and more than half of them died. That is why health officials are watching for any person-to-person spread of bird flu.

**Could bird flu cause the next pandemic?**

Currently, there is no pandemic flu. At this time, it is uncertain whether Avian H5N1 will lead to a pandemic. Close contact with infected birds has been the primary source for human infection. Though rare, there have been isolated reports of human-to-human transmission of the virus.

**What is “pandemic influenza”?**

Pandemic influenza is a worldwide outbreak of a new influenza virus to which few people, if any, will have immunity. Having no immunity means that a person’s body has no protection against a disease. Because there is little immunity, the disease can spread easily and quickly from person to person.

**Does seasonal influenza vaccine protect me from avian influenza?**

No, seasonal influenza vaccine does not provide protection against avian influenza. Large amounts of vaccine cannot be made before knowing exactly which virus will cause the pandemic. It could then take up to six months before a vaccine is available and even then it would only be available in limited amounts at first. Research is underway to make vaccines more quickly.

**What is being done to keep bird flu from becoming the next pandemic?**

Health officials around the world are watching for any person-to-person spread of bird flu. Public health officials in every state and almost every nation are preparing for pandemic flu. A worldwide network of laboratories detects and tracks flu viruses. There’s a program for fast distribution of vaccines and medicines and several systems are in place for sharing emergency health information. National, state and local preparedness efforts are on-going.

**What is the Iowa Department of Public Health doing to prepare for pandemic and avian influenza?**

During every “flu season,” usually in the fall and winter months, Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) tracks the different types of influenza that occur in people who visit their doctor, attend school or child care, or live in a long-term care facility. IDPH is also working on a pandemic influenza response plan.

**What advice would you give someone traveling to a country affected by bird flu?**

Travelers going outside of the U.S. should take steps to minimize risks while on their trip. Avoid contact with chickens and ducks including droppings and blood. Follow good health habits such as frequent hand washing. Avoid live animal markets, bird farms and partially cooked bird. There are other things you can do after you return from your travels as well. If you have any illness within 10 days of your return, see your health care provider. Be sure to tell your health care provider about your travel. So far, no U.S. travelers to Southeast Asia or Europe have gotten bird flu.