

Avian influenza : Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is Avian Influenza?**

Avian influenza, or "bird flu" or "avian flu" is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens and ducks, very sick and kill them.

2. **Do avian flu viruses infect humans?**

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

3. **How does avian flu spread in birds?**

Infected birds shed flu virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces (droppings). Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions.

4. **How does avian flu spread in humans?**

It is believed that most cases of bird flu infection in humans have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. There is no evidence of human-to-human transmission so far.

5. **What is a pandemic?**

A pandemic is an epidemic that usually affects a large proportion of the population, occurring over a wide geographic area such as a section of a nation, the entire nation, a continent or the world.

6. **should be done if migratory birds are sighted near one's house?**

Migratory birds may or may not carry the avian flu virus. It depends on whether these birds have flown from a region where avian flu is prevalent. This can be determined only by an expert. Therefore in case a migratory bird is sighted, it should not be killed. However, as a precaution, one should stay away from these birds and their droppings. The municipal authorities should be informed immediately.

7. **What should be done if one sight's a dead bird?**

If the cause of death of the bird is not certain, the municipal authorities should be informed immediately. They may send the bird for testing to find out whether or not it was infected with the

avian influenza virus. In case of unusual death of poultry, the civic authorities must be informed immediately.

8. **Can avian flu be contracted by visiting a shop that is next to a shop that sells chicken?**

In the event of a pandemic of avian flu, it is possible

9. **Is it safe to eat poultry and poultry products?**

Poultry and poultry products can be prepared and consumed as usual, with no fear of acquiring infection with the avian flu virus. One should continue to follow good hygienic and cooking practices. The virus is destroyed at a temperature of 70° C for 30 minutes. After handling poultry and eggs, one should wash hands and other exposed parts with soap and water.

10. **Are the chicken droppings on eggs infective?**

As it is likely that the eggs that reach the consumer were laid several hours ago, the likelihood of infection is low, even if the droppings were carrying the avian flu virus. The avian flu virus is destroyed by drying, and exposure to sunlight for a few hours.

However, in the event of a pandemic, recent droppings are to be considered infective unless proven otherwise.

11. **Is it safe to use chicken-droppings as manure?**

During a pandemic, do not come in contact with fresh droppings. Use some other manure until such time the pandemic has cleared

12. **How can avian flu be controlled in poultry?**

At present, culling is the only way to contain avian flu in poultry.

13. **Can domestic normal-appearing ducks spread avian flu?**

Yes they can. In fact, waterfowls are known to be reservoirs of infection. The avian flu virus does not harm these waterfowls. However the waterfowls can spread the avian flu virus to humans. These waterfowls are therefore "carriers" of avian flu.

14. **Can a person suffering from influenza suffer from avian flu at the same time?**

Yes, it is possible. Neither suffering from influenza, nor vaccination against human influenza offers protection against avian flu. However, health care providers and others who are at high risk of infection should get themselves vaccinated against human influenza virus so that they are at least protected against one of them.

15. **What are the symptoms and signs of avian flu in humans?**

Cough, fever, sore throat, muscle aches, pneumonia and other complications

16. What is the test for avian flu?

A throat swab is taken from the patient to test for avian flu.

17. Which are the places where such testing is done?

The testing facilities are currently available at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, and National Institute of Virology, Pune.

18. Is there a vaccine for humans against avian flu?

There is no vaccine for humans against avian flu. The vaccine against human influenza virus does not protect against avian flu.

19. Are any medicines available to prevent bird flu in humans?

There is no recommendation for the routine use of medicines for the prevention of bird flu in humans.