



Key Facts About Avian Influenza Outbreak in Europe

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KEY FACTS ABOUT AVIAN INFLUENZA

Avian influenza type H5N1 is a disease currently affecting birds, wild and domestic, in several parts of the world.

In the EU, a few sporadic outbreaks have occurred since 2006 both in wild birds and poultry, which have so far been successfully contained.

The H5N1 virus is primarily an animal disease, and it does not easily cross from birds to humans.

People that have been infected had been in very close contact with live or dead infected birds, principally domestic poultry in backyards.

Very stringent veterinary measures are in place in the EU. These seek to prevent the spread of the virus from wild birds to poultry and to contain any outbreaks in poultry.

Temporary protection and surveillance zones are established in areas where infected birds are found. In these zones, movement of live animals is restricted, poultry is confined indoors and closely monitored, and disinfection measures are strictly applied.

When there is an outbreak in a domestic holding, all the birds are culled and measures are taken to protect the workers.

Very specific measures are also in place to prevent infected birds entering the food chain.

In any case, thorough cooking ensures that meat and eggs are free of any virus.

The risks to the general public of catching the H5N1 virus from live animals or from poultry products are very low and there is no need to change food consumption habits or travel plans.

Consumption of poultry products

It is safe to eat poultry –meat or eggs– that you buy in the EU. This is because strict food safety and veterinary measures are in place to prevent meat or eggs from unhealthy animals entering the food chain.

Trade from protection and surveillance zones within the EU (where infected birds have been found) is only allowed following very strict veterinary controls and imports from affected third countries are banned.

In the event of an outbreak on a poultry farm, the entire flock is culled and disposed of immediately. Poultry meat and eggs produced on these farms are also destroyed.

Even in the very unlikely event of the virus being present in meat or eggs sold in the EU, thorough cooking destroys the virus, so well cooked meat and eggs pose no risk.



Meat from vaccinated poultry is not harmful for human health as the virus included in the vaccine is killed and cannot multiply.

Groups at risk

People who keep birds such as chickens, ducks and geese near where they live need not be overly alarmed, but they should be aware of the risks. In particular, they should:

Follow instructions from local veterinary authorities, especially on the need to feed and water poultry indoors and to keep poultry indoors in risk areas.

Notify the authorities if unusually high numbers of dead wild birds are seen, or if any of their birds get sick or die under unusual circumstances. In such cases, people must not touch dead or sick birds themselves.

Keep the birds out of their home and follow good hygiene rules – in particular, hand washing with soap when in contact with birds or bird excrement.

Discourage their children from playing with the birds and teach them to tell an adult if they see sick or dead birds.

Make sure children in particular understand the rules of basic hygiene.

Never slaughter or eat sick or dying birds, as this could carry greater risk.

Other people who come into regular contact with poultry (e.g. farm workers, vets) or wild birds (e.g. hunters, bird watchers) also need to be aware of the risks and take precautions.

The [ECDC](#) has produced detailed guidance on the protection of people at risk and those living or travelling to areas where infected birds have been found. National authorities are there to advise on any questions.

Other members of the public

It is very unlikely that other members of the public would be in contact with infected birds.

The following good sense precautions are sufficient:

Don't touch sick or dead wild birds or poultry and inform your local veterinary authorities if you find any suspicious numbers of dead or ill birds.

Follow the normal rules of good hygiene - i.e. wash your hands with soap after contact with birds or their droppings

If there is an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza among birds in your area:

Your national authorities may impose temporary restrictions on the movement of poultry and declare certain places off-limit to people. It is important that you follow these instructions as they are designed to stop the virus spreading.



In these areas, pet cats should be kept indoors to prevent them from coming into contact with wild infected birds or their droppings, and to prevent them transporting the virus on their paws and becoming infected themselves.

Travel

There is little or no risk from traveling to countries outside the EU or areas inside the EU where avian flu has been detected, provided you avoid visiting poultry farms or bird markets and follow the precautions outlined above, as indicated in the ECDC guidance.

Human flu pandemic

At the moment the virus responsible for Avian flu (H5N1), although can be transmitted from the infected animals to the humans is not considered as a virus well adapted to human beings. In fact, human-to-human transmission is considered rare.

However, there is always a possibility that the H5N1 avian influenza virus could mutate into a new virus more adapted to humans and with a potential to give origin to a new pandemic strain. That is why a close and constant surveillance of the H5N1 virus, as well as of other Influenza viruses circulating in animals, will be of pivotal importance for monitoring their evolution.

The H5N1 Avian flu virus is not linked to the H1N1 virus that has caused the 2009 human influenza pandemic. However, Influenza viruses are unpredictable. They might interact among them and give origin to more virulent and human-adapted viruses.

The emergence of the H5N1 virus in birds and humans and the H1N1 influenza pandemic have shown that surveillance, preparedness and cooperation between the medical doctors and the veterinarians is of utmost importance to respond efficiently to the



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