



# Avian (H5N1) Influenza

- Avian influenza (“bird flu”) is a disease caused by viruses that primarily infect birds but may also infect other animals, including humans. Nearly 600 cases of human H5N1 have been reported, worldwide, since 2003.
- Flu viruses mutate frequently. Currently, highly pathogenic H5N1, a specific strain of avian flu virus, has not mutated to permit easy human-to-human transmission. Most human cases of H5N1 occur in people directly exposed to infected poultry.
- If this H5N1 flu virus does develop the capacity for human-to-human transmission, it could become pandemic, like the novel H1N1 (“swine”) flu virus. It is difficult to forecast whether or when this will occur.
- Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak caused by a new strain of flu virus, against which people have little or no residual immunity. This designation reflects the spread of the virus, not the severity of the illness it causes. Pandemics can affect daily life for a period of time and could cause business closings and society-wide disruptions in the economy and every-day functions.

## Transmission and Symptoms, Compared to Seasonal Flu

	Seasonal (Common) Flu	Avian Flu
<b>Transmission</b>	Spread through droplets expelled during coughing and sneezing.	Spread through contact with infected birds, their droppings or blood, or surfaces exposed to them. However, due to the changing nature of flu viruses, it is possible that avian flu will mutate to spread from person to person.
<b>Symptoms</b>	High fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle aches, and nausea (which may lead to vomiting and diarrhea).	Similar to those of seasonal flu but may include eye infections and severe respiratory diseases.
<b>Who Is at Risk</b>	Those 65 years or older, those who live in long-term care facilities or need regular medical attention, those prone to asthma or other respiratory conditions, and young children (6–23 months).	People of all ages are at risk. Past pandemic influenza outbreaks suggest that healthy young adults may be most at risk of exposure.

## Prevention

Influenza can be prevented by vaccines and good hygiene.

- Update flu shots and other vaccinations to boost immunity.
- Get vaccinated every year because the seasonal flu vaccine is changed annually to help fight the most threatening strains.
- Periodically check your regular prescription medications to ensure you have an adequate supply and expiration dates are not exceeded.
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean cutting boards and utensils, use a food thermometer to make sure poultry is cooked properly, and cook eggs until white and yolks are firm.
- There is no danger from properly handled and cooked poultry.



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## Vaccine and Treatment

- No vaccine is commercially available for the current H5N1 avian flu virus, but some vaccine is being held in stockpiles. If a future strain, more capable of human-to-human transmission, emerges, it will likely require the development of a strain-specific vaccine.
- Antiviral medicines can treat some cases of avian flu.

## Emergency Response

- Be calm—stay informed and follow emergency plans.
- Practice infection control
  - » Good hygiene (especially washing hands)
  - » Social distancing
    - \* Limit direct contact by not shaking hands.
    - \* Telecommute or hold telephone or video conferences.
    - \* Maintain personal space of three feet or more.
- Limit exposure with sick people, and stay home if you are sick.
- Quarantine and isolation measures may be used to limit movement of people who may have been exposed to the disease and separate those infected with the disease.
- Muster with your command if you are military or civilian personnel or a member of the selective reserves.

## Preparation for a Pandemic

- Be informed and have a family plan as you would for any emergency.
- Be aware of emergency, containment, or evacuation plans and distribution sites.
- Build an emergency supply kit with a two week supply of water and food.

## For Travelers and Those Serving Abroad

- Avian flu has been reported in wild and domesticated bird flocks in four regions at this writing, and there have been human cases in the same regions: Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.
- Stay informed of potential risks and the latest medical guidance at your destination.
- Complete the emergency information page in your passport.
- Register with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate through the State Department website.
- Obtain adequate insurance that includes medical evacuation.
- Create a travel health kit that includes a thermometer and hand gel.
- For a “stay in place” response, stock a supply of water and food for a minimum of three days, two weeks recommended.
- Be aware of local laws and emergency plans.

## Where to Find Additional Information

- Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Pandemic Influenza Website—[www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Diseases\\_Conditions/influenza.aspx](http://www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Diseases_Conditions/influenza.aspx)
- Flu.gov (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)—[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/>
- World Health Organization (WHO)—[www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en)
- U.S. Department of State—[www.travel.state.gov/index.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/index.html)