

Avian Influenza “Bird Flu”

In current cases, the spread of the bird flu virus has been from person to person and has not continued beyond one person. Scientists continue to be concerned because influenza viruses have the ability to change. One day the virus could be able to infect humans and spread easily from one person to another. Because these viruses do not commonly infect humans, there is little or no immune protection against them in the human population. If bird flu were to gain the capacity to spread easily from person to person, influenza pandemic could begin.

The reported symptoms of bird flu have ranged from typical symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches to eye infections, pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia, and other severe life-threatening complications.

Most cases of bird flu in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry or surfaces contaminated with secretions and excretions from infected birds. Even if poultry and eggs were contaminated with the virus, proper cooking would kill it.

Any person who presents to the agency with fever and respiratory symptoms should be managed according to recommendations for Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquettes and questioned regarding recent travel. The Respiratory Hygiene and Cough Etiquettes are:

- Cover the nose/mouth when coughing or sneezing;
- Use tissues to contain respiratory secretions and dispose of them in the nearest waste receptacle after use;
- Perform hand hygiene (hand washing with non-antimicrobial soap and water, alcohol based hand rub, or antiseptic hand washing) after having contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects/material.

The agency should provide patients and visitors in waiting areas.

- Provide tissues and no-touch receptacles for used tissue disposal.
- Insure soap and disposable towels are consistently available in the restrooms.

It is a good idea, during periods of increased respiratory infection activity in the community offer masks to persons who are coughing. Either procedure masks or surgical masks may be used to contain respiratory secretions. When space and chair availability permit, encourage coughing persons to sit at least three feet away from others in common waiting areas.