

Avian influenza: Information for Contacts

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This information is for anyone who may have been exposed to *avian influenza* from poultry or other birds.

- ✓ **Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds.**
- ✓ **Most avian influenza viruses either do not infect humans, or cause only mild symptoms; however some strains have caused serious infections in people overseas.**
- ✓ **When avian influenza is identified in birds it is difficult to know what risk, if any, it presents to humans. For this reason it is best to take appropriate precautions and closely monitor your health.**

Avian influenza viruses

- *Avian influenza* viruses are common in wild water birds around the world, and usually cause them few problems. *Avian influenza* outbreaks among poultry* occur worldwide from time to time, including in Australia.
- Some strains of *avian influenza* can cause serious illness and death in infected poultry.
- All *avian influenza* in poultry is taken seriously because of the potential for mutations (changes in the virus) that could pose a serious threat to people and poultry.
- Only a few *avian influenza* strains infect people. When they do, they usually cause mild illness including conjunctivitis (eye infections) and flu-like symptoms (fever, headache and tiredness).
- Some strains of *avian influenza* can cause serious illness in people, and can occasionally result in death. These strains have been found in South East Asia, China and the Middle East but not in Australia so far.

How do people become infected with avian influenza?

- Poultry infected with *avian influenza* release large amounts of virus in their faeces which can contaminate the area around them.
- People are most likely to be infected with the virus by touching infected poultry or surfaces that have faeces on them.
- People may also be infected by dust that contains dried faeces by breathing it in or accidentally rubbing it in their eyes.
- There is also a risk of infection during slaughter, de-feathering, butchering, and preparation of infected poultry.
- People **cannot be infected with avian influenza** by eating chicken, birds or eggs that are cooked well.

Does the avian influenza virus spread easily from poultry to people?

- No. *Avian influenza* usually does not readily infect people.
- People might be at increased risk of the disease if there is a change in the virus or if they are exposed to large amounts of the virus.

How to protect yourself:

- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) including:
 - ✓ disposable gloves;
 - ✓ overalls or disposable coveralls;
 - ✓ disposable shoes or shoe covers;
 - ✓ respiratory protection (P2/N95 respirator mask); and
 - ✓ eye protection (goggles or face shield).
- Make sure PPE is either safely disposed of or cleaned properly after use.
- Wash hands before and after handling animals or touching surfaces contaminated by poultry secretions (faeces, respiratory secretions or saliva or contaminated products, such as litter), and after removing or handling PPE.

*Poultry refers to domesticated birds that are kept for meat, egg laying, for their feathers or as pets. This includes chickens, turkeys and other types of birds.

- Seek expert advice and instruction on the correct use and safe disposal of PPE, and general infection control.
- Make sure people involved in the outbreak response have received the current flu vaccine (see Vaccination section below).
- Discourage anyone who is unwell, particularly people suspected of being unwell with the flu (e.g. fever, cough, tiredness, muscle aches, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose, or headache), from entering a poultry house, processing facility or an area being used for investigation.

Remember your Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), even if risk is low:

- It is important to use protective equipment to reduce the risk of infection, even if the chance of becoming infected is low.
- It is important that people working in or visiting a place with infected poultry take actions to protect themselves and others.

Vaccination

- Vaccination with the current flu vaccine is recommended for:
 - ✓ People who may be exposed to poultry infected with *avian influenza* as part of their work. Ideally, the flu vaccine should be given at least 14 days before exposure.
 - ✓ People who have had direct contact with poultry infected with *avian influenza*.
- It is important to remember that a flu vaccine **will not** protect against *avian influenza* itself.
- However, a flu vaccine can help to avoid someone becoming infected with multiple strains of influenza at the same time. If someone was to get both *avian influenza* and another influenza strain at the same time, the two viruses could mix and produce a new, highly infectious human influenza virus which could be a serious threat to their families and the wider community.

Monitoring yourself: workers and other people exposed

- Workers and other people who have been in close contact with poultry infected with *avian influenza* should **carefully** monitor their health while working with infected poultry or infected poultry products. Workers should monitor their health for **10 days after last contact with infected poultry**.
- Any new symptoms should be reported to your local Public Health Unit 1300 066 055.

Monitoring yourself involves watching for any new symptoms, particularly the following:

- ✓ fever of over 38°C (check your temperature each day), or chills or shakes;
- ✓ respiratory problems (e.g. sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing);
- ✓ extreme tiredness or collapse due to exhaustion;
- ✓ headache, neck stiffness, and muscle or joint aches;
- ✓ nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea; and
- ✓ red, sore eyes (conjunctivitis).

If new symptoms are detected:

- **Report** the illness to your local Public Health Unit (Telephone 1300 066 055).
- **Phone** your doctor for an appointment and report that you may have been in contact with *avian influenza*
- **Isolate** yourself from others as much as possible until you've seen a doctor.
- **Practice good respiratory hygiene:** cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or using tissues or handkerchiefs. Dispose of used tissues in a bin.
- **In a medical emergency always seek immediate health care or phone 000.**

Public Health Unit Contact Details

For further health information or to report illness, phone your local Public Health Unit on **1300 066 055**.

Additional Information:

- NSW Health Avian influenza in Humans: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/avianinfluenza.aspx>
- NSW Department of Primary Industries: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/poultry-and-birds/health-disease/avian-influenza>
- WHO Avian influenza Factsheet: www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/avian_influenza/en/index.html