



AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA FACT SHEET

The threat of the H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a global concern. Experts anticipate that the virus will soon reach the United States (U.S). Arrival of the virus **will not** signal an influenza pandemic in humans. This occurrence in the U.S. **will** mean, however, that the H5N1 strain is present in the nation's wild bird population with the potential to spread to the domestic poultry population, resulting in an avian panzootic (as opposed to pandemic, a term correctly reserved for a worldwide human infection).

Avian (Bird) Influenza

Avian influenza (AI) -- the "bird flu" -- is a disease caused by a virus that infects domestic poultry and wild birds (geese, ducks, and shorebirds). Each year, there is a flu season in birds, just as there is for humans. Some strains of the bird flu virus cause mild (Low Pathogenicity) or severe (High Pathogenicity) illness in birds. Currently, the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain is causing devastation to wild birds and poultry population. Daily reports indicate an increasing spread of infection in bird populations in Southeast Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Hundreds of thousands of birds have been affected. It is expected that the H5N1 virus will come to North America either by migratory birds, the poultry trade, or maybe human travel.

Penetration of the H5N1 virus into the US poultry market is considered to be of minimal risk. As such, it is safe to continue to eat poultry that has been fully cooked. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) has restricted the importation of any poultry or poultry products from countries with evidence of the H5N1 avian virus. **Government is taking steps to prepare for and minimize the potential impact of bird flu.**

Pandemic Influenza

Currently, there is no influenza pandemic. If an avian flu virus becomes easily transmissible from person-to-person, infecting large numbers of people, causing significant illness, the virus then becomes a human flu virus and could trigger a "pandemic flu." This process, however, would take multiple mutations of the current H5NI virus, or may result from the mutation of a totally different avian influenza virus in the future. In any case, there is grave concern, as humans may not have a preexisting immunity to the potential offending agent.

To date, over 200 individuals have been infected with the H5N1 HPAI virus. More than half of these have died, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Most infected persons contracted the disease through close contact with live infected birds. Persons at risk are those involved in the slaughter, preparation, and consumption of infected birds and its by-products and/or exposed to, blood, secretions, or feces of infected animals. Those persons who directly handle birds infected with the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus are at the greatest risk for

getting the disease. Although clusters of human-to-human transmission are being reported, so far, the H5N1 AI virus has not demonstrated sustained person-to-person transmission.

The National Medical Association (NMA) supports efforts of the federal government to help communities prepare for a potential pandemic influenza. In 2005, the Bush Administration asked Congress for \$7.1 billion in emergency funding for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, of which \$6.7 billion was requested for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Congress appropriated \$3.8 billion as the first installment, of which \$3.3 billion was provided to HHS. Starting in March 2006, HHS, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is allocating \$350 million to help State and local governments prepare for a pandemic influenza outbreak.

Vaccines for Avian and Pandemic Influenza

Currently, there is no vaccine commercially available for the avian influenza.. A vaccine is also not available for pandemic influenza because the virus does not yet exist. Once a pandemic does occur and the responsible virus is identified, it will take six months or more to develop a vaccine. Researchers are looking at ways to develop vaccines in a more efficient manner than currently employed. In addition to developing vaccines, the government is working with manufactures to increase supplies of antiviral drugs, such as oseltamavir (Tamiflu®) and zanamavir (Relenza®). These medications are already available for use in the prevention and treatment of seasonal influenza. Because H5N1 viruses are generally resistant to the two other available antiviral medications, amantadine and rimantadine, these antiviral medications cannot be used to treat avian influenza. The NMA support efforts to develop safe and effective vaccines to combat potential influenza threats, and to increase the supply of antiviral drugs to help treat influenza during an outbreak.

Influenza Precautions

If visiting an area affected by H5N1 HPAI, adhere to the following practices:

- Avoid contact with live birds, chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese, and their feces, feathers, and pens if at all possible.
- Do not keep pet birds.
- Wash hands with soap and water after any poultry contact.
- Be sure, if possible, that poultry does not live near your housing area.
- Do not transport live or dead poultry even if it appears to be healthy.
- Avoid poultry products from areas of infected birds.
- If you must travel to infected areas and work directly with infected birds, poultry, or humans, hand washing and shoe and clothing cleaning should be an immediate priority.
- Be sure to wear gloves, a special N-95 mask, goggles, and a disposable gown if you must be in contact with the birds/poultry in enclosed environments where aerosolization of the small virus particles may occur.
- Observe yourself for the development of any respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms after the visit and check your temperature for a week afterwards, and contact a physician if you have any questions.

Otherwise, in general, certain precautions must always be taken when handling raw poultry (or other meats) and eggs:

- Wash hands and surfaces before and after food preparation.
- Avoid utilizing the same utensils for raw meat at the same time with other foods, even cooked meat.
- **Cook all meat thoroughly to 165°F and cook eggs until the yolk is firm and not runny.**

Take the same precautions to protect yourself against avian and pandemic influenza as you would from colds and seasonal influenza.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Frequently and properly (at least 20 seconds) wash your hands with soap and warm water after sneezing, coughing, and blowing your nose. If no water is available use a hand sanitizer.
- Stay home if you have a cough or fever.
- Stay away from others who are sick.
- See your health care provider, as soon as possible, if you have a cough or fever and follow their instructions.

The annual influenza vaccination remains the primary preventive measure to prevent morbidity and mortality associated with influenza..

Emergency Preparedness

When preparing for a possible emergency situation, such as avian or pandemic influenza, make arrangements for a generous supply of essential needs such as fresh water, food, warmth, medications, battery powered radio, flashlight, extra batteries, money, a phone, and large trash bags for garbage and waste. NMA members should take the time to develop a family emergency plan, as it may be necessary to remain in your home for several weeks. Visit <http://ready.gov> to help generate a family disaster plan and check <http://pandemicflu.gov> for a checklist of what you should do to protect yourself against avian and pandemic influenza.

Currently, the CDC does not recommend that the general public stockpile face masks or antiviral medications. However, individuals may still choose to include these items as part of their personal projective plan.

The NMA encourages African Americans throughout the country to take all recommended precautions against the spread of avian influenza and prepare for the possibility of a pandemic influenza. An informed and responsive community is essential to minimizing the health effects of a pandemic and the resulting consequences.