



One minute guide to...

BIRD (AVIAN) FLU

What is it?

Bird flu, or avian influenza, is an infectious type of influenza (with lots of different strains) that spreads among birds and in very rare cases it can affect humans (for e.g. H5, H7 and H9 strains).

In humans, bird flu symptoms vary, depending on the virus strain. Symptoms range from a mild flu like illness, sometimes with conjunctivitis (red, sore, discharging eyes), diarrhoea and abdominal pain, to a severe respiratory illness with breathing difficulties and pneumonia.

How does bird flu spread?

Bird flu is spread by close contact with an infected bird (dead or alive). This includes touching infected birds; their droppings or bedding; or killing/preparing infected poultry for cooking.

However, you can't catch bird flu through eating fully cooked poultry or eggs, even in areas with an outbreak of bird flu.

Things that can be done to prevent bird flu:

UKHSA recommends avoiding contact with sick or dead wild birds in public areas such as parks or waterways, and wash hands after feeling wild birds.

If you are in a country where there is an outbreak it is important to:

- Wash hands regularly using soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rubs when washing facilities are not available. This is especially important before and after handling food (particularly with raw poultry).
- Use different utensils for cooked and raw meat.
- Make sure meat is fully cooked, and do not eat undercooked nor raw eggs, poultry nor duck.
- Avoid contact with live birds and poultry (for e.g. poultry farms/animal markets)
- Do not go near or touch bird droppings, feathers, nests, nor sick/dead birds.

Seek prompt medical advice if you become ill with severe breathing difficulties within 10 days of travel to any country affected by avian influenza outbreaks.

The seasonal flu vaccine available in the UK from September/October each year will not prevent infection with avian influenza viruses.

Further Information:

From NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bird-flu/>

UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) advice and information:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/avian-influenza-guidance-data-and-analysis>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bird-flu-avian-influenza-latest-situation-in-england>

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