



NEWS BULLETIN FROM PUBLIC HEALTH **Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)**

What is Bird Flu?

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997. The current outbreak of avian influenza A (H5N1) among poultry in Asia is an example of a bird flu outbreak that has caused some human infections and deaths.

History

In the past century, the great influenza pandemic of 1918–1919 caused an estimated 40 to 50 million deaths worldwide and was followed by pandemics in 1957–1958 and 1968–1969.

Present Outbreak

The first documented infection of humans with an avian influenza virus occurred in Hong Kong in 1997, when the H5N1 strain caused severe respiratory disease in 18 humans, of whom 6 died. The present outbreaks of H5N1 started among poultry in eight countries in Asia (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam) during late 2003 and early 2004. Currently there have been reports of Human cases from Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Turkey and Romania. So far the virus has infected more than 100 humans and killed 60–65 in Asia.

Transmission

Avian influenza viruses may be transmitted to humans in two main ways:

- Directly from birds or from avian virus-contaminated environments to people.
- Through an intermediate host, such as a pig.

Fortunately the virus does not spread easily from humans to humans, if at all. But experts fear that the virus could change

in ways that make it possible for it to spread easily between humans.

Vaccination/ Treatment

There currently is no vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 virus that is being seen in Asia. However, vaccine development efforts are under way.

Four antiviral drugs (amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir, and zanamivir) are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment and/or prevention of influenza. However, some influenza strains become resistant to these drugs. International public health officials are constantly monitoring avian viruses for resistance to these drugs so that the most effective antiviral medication can be used in any outbreak.

What is the risk to people in the United States?

The current risk to Americans from the H5N1 bird flu outbreak is low. The strain of H5N1 virus found in Asia has not been found in the United States. There have been no human cases of H5N1 flu in the United States.

Do I need to worry about dead birds in my community?

No. There is no evidence any birds in the U.S. are affected by the avian flu.

What is Public Health doing to prepare for a possible bird flu outbreak?

The Champaign-Urbana Public Health District and the Champaign County Public Health Department:

- 1) Investigate all infectious disease outbreaks in Champaign County;
- 2) Get regular updates from state and national health authorities about influenza activity anywhere in the U.S. or in the world;
- 3) Plan and train to dispense vaccine or antiviral medicine to large numbers of people - if needed in an outbreak. (Public Health's last drill was in September, 2005)

In the event of a bird flu outbreak in Champaign County, Public Health investigators and other health officials would:

- 1) Locate and isolate every person affected by the disease, and every person exposed to the disease;
- 2) Educate the public about the disease and how to avoid coming into contact with it;
- 3) Dispense medications or vaccine as needed.

For more information go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/facts.htm>