

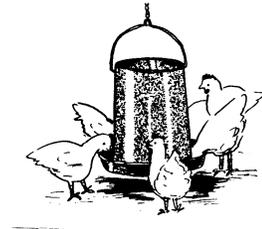


The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service

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BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .

THREAT OF BIRD FLU WARRANTS DUE VIGILANCE

Quick Facts:

- The highly pathogenic strain (H5N1) of Avian Flu is not present in the United States.
- It is very difficult for the Avian Flu to be transmitted to humans.
- Human-to-human transmission is extremely rare.
- Conditions in the U.S. poultry industry are radically different than those found in Asia and much of the rest of the world. As such, the opportunity for transmission of any virus from poultry to humans is limited.
- The Avian Flu virus is killed by normal cooking temperatures; therefore properly cooked poultry meat and eggs poses no danger to human health.
- Virtually all poultry consumed in the U.S. is produced here and not imported.

What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza (AI) is a viral disease of the respiratory system. This disease is often referred to as Bird Flu. There are several different types of AI. The milder forms are known as Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) and are found all over the world. The more serious forms are known as High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) which results in high mortality in poultry flocks. There are currently no flocks in the U.S. that are infected with HPAI. Migratory birds are blamed for spreading the Asian bird flu strain and there is concern by health officials that birds could carry the virus from Asia to Europe and North America during spring migrations.

Has Avian Influenza ever infected poultry in the United States?

The U.S. has never had an outbreak of the Asian-type of AI. Milder forms of AI have occurred in the U.S. industry. However, when an outbreak occurs, cooperation between poultry companies, federal, state and local authorities contain and eradicate the disease. Bird-to-human transmission of the disease has never occurred within the U.S.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

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Can humans contract the disease?

Yes. Several cases have been reported in Southeast Asia. Virtually all the cases, however, were associated with direct, continual contact with live, infected poultry. Most experts do not believe the Asian form of AI is likely to become a serious human health issue due to the low probability of transmission. It is very difficult for the AI virus to be transmitted to humans and is extremely rare for AI to be transmitted from human to human. The current virus has not yet mutated to the point that it can easily spread from person to person. Despite this, the dire projections of the impact of a potential worldwide flu pandemic are causing anxiety levels to rise in most Americans.

There is no danger of contracting Avian Influenza from eating or handling poultry meat.

Since Asian Bird Flu does not exist in U.S. poultry, there is virtually no chance of coming into contact with meat from infected birds. The U.S. has banned poultry imports from all countries where Asian Bird Flu has occurred and has never imported meat from Southeast Asia where the disease originated. Cooked poultry is not a danger, as the AI virus is killed by normal cooking temperatures. It is always good practice to wash hands after handling uncooked poultry products to prevent food-borne infection.

Great effort is being made to prevent Asian Bird Flu from coming into the U.S.

Plans have been developed to minimize the chance that AI might infect U.S. poultry flocks. Poultry companies and the U.S. government are taking the necessary precautions to keep the virus out of the country and to help limit the possibility of human illness. The poultry industry continuously tests to ensure that the virus does not gain a hold in U.S. flocks. If a flock does become infected, procedures are in place to quickly eliminate the infection and prevent further transmission. Federal and state agencies, universities, public health departments, poultry companies, and trade groups have all worked together to develop a comprehensive rapid response plan. If AI is detected, a wide area around the outbreak will be immediately quarantined. Infected birds will be humanely destroyed and disposed of in an environmentally sound way to stop the chance of any additional spread of the virus. The U.S. poultry industry has had success in controlling similar viral diseases and is preparing to meet the challenge of this potential threat as well.

Backyard poultry pose a threat to the commercial industry.

Most poultry in rural Asia are kept in people's homes, backyards or allowed to roam free. Wild birds can carry the virus that causes the disease and spread it to these "outdoor" poultry. In the U.S., commercial poultry flocks are housed in environmentally controlled poultry houses, effectively isolating them from contact with wild birds and other vectors that may transmit the disease. While the methods of commercial poultry production in the U.S. make an Asian Bird Flu outbreak much less likely here, backyard flocks need additional vigilance to prevent the spread of the flu virus. Because of the destructive potential that a contagious poultry disease could have on our commercial industry, small flock owners are encouraged to adopt the following:

- Take a more rigid attitude towards biosecurity precautions commonly used in the commercial industry.
- Wear dedicated footwear that can be sanitized after every visit when attending to your birds.
- Prevent wild birds, particularly waterfowl, from mingling with the flock to lessen the chance for exposure. This may require penning the birds during this time of heightened concern. Keeping your birds confined not only keeps them protected from the elements but helps to keep other animals and organisms out.

- Isolating poultry from other livestock is important as chickens, turkeys, cattle, swine, and equine are all subject to cross infection.
- Avoid coming in contact with other birds and flocks, particularly birds with questionable origin at auctions, flea and live bird markets. Purchase new stock from reputable dealers, preferably those that participate with the National Poultry Improvement Plan.
- Quarantine all new birds away from the existing flock for at least 3 weeks.
- Step up sanitation efforts and maintain clean housing, feed and watering equipment.
- Sick birds that survive such viral disease become carriers of the virus and can infect unexposed birds. It is better to depopulate the flock that has become sick than risk spreading the disease to others.
- Early recognition of disease can reduce the spread of infection. Look for changes in eating, drinking, and behavioral habits and for signs and sounds of respiratory distress.
- Report sick or dying birds to the appropriate authorities. (Georgia Poultry Lab System, 770-535-5996).

During this time of growing concern over a possible Bird Flu outbreak, due vigilance is warranted for backyard poultrymen and commercial growers alike.

Resources for Additional Information

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/aflu/Avian%20Influenza.htm>

<http://www.nationalchickencouncil.com/>

<http://www.unitedegg.com/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>


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“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”