



## Avian Flu Fact Sheet

### What is avian flu?

Avian influenza, commonly known as “avian flu” or “bird flu,” is caused by influenza type A viruses that normally only occur in birds. Avian flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, such as chickens, ducks and turkeys, very sick and kill them. These viruses usually do not infect humans, but in recent years several cases of avian flu infection in humans have been reported.

There are several subtypes of avian influenza A viruses. The subtype that has become of major concern is avian influenza A (H5N1) virus, which has caused the deaths of millions of birds and also poses a health risk to humans. The H5N1 virus has caused the deaths of millions of birds and of more than 140 people worldwide. These deaths have thus far been restricted to Asia, the Middle East and Africa. As 2008, the H5N1 virus has not been found in the United States.

### Who is at risk of exposure to avian flu?

While all people are at risk, certain working groups will be at greater risk. They are:

- Health care workers
- First responders
- Public health employees
- Poultry workers—handling/eradicating infected birds
- Other animal handlers—handling/eradicating infected birds
- Laboratory workers
- Food handlers working with raw poultry

### What can I do to protect myself?

#### General Precautions

- Wash hands thoroughly and frequently, for 15-20 seconds, preferably with soap and water.
- Avoid contact with possibly infected poultry.
- Avoid consuming uncooked or undercooked poultry or poultry products.

## Precautions When Exposed

Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE):

- Disposable gloves or gloves that can be disinfected;
- Protective clothing (long-sleeved coveralls with a waterproof apron);
- Disposable shoe covers or those that can be disinfected;
- Safety goggles; and
- Wear at least the minimum level of respiratory protection, N95 or higher respirator.

Employees should remove all PPE at work to avoid taking contaminated items home.

## Precautions When Working With Potentially Infected Animals

Wear appropriate, preferably disposable, personal protective equipment (PPE); or wear equipment that can be disinfected:

- Gloves
- Shoe covers
- Safety goggles
- Outer garments with a waterproof apron
- Wear at least the minimum level of respiratory protection, N95 or higher respirator.
- While wearing PPE, avoid eating, drinking and smoking.

## Are there occupational safety and health standards for avian flu?

There are no specific OSH standards for avian flu; however, the following standards can be applied:

- **29 CFR 1910.132—PPE—general requirements**
- **29 CFR 1910.133—Eye and Face Protection**
- **29 CFR 1910.134—Respiratory Protection**
- **29 CFR 1910.138—Hand Protection**

Additionally, N.C. General Statute 95-129(1), commonly referred to as the Generally Duty Clause, may be applied for recognized hazards not covered by a specific NCDOL standard.

## Where can I find additional information about avian flu?

Please review our [Pandemic Flu Subject Index](#) Page.