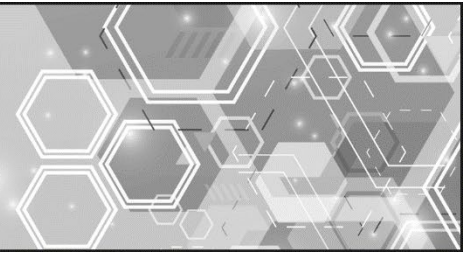




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Avian Influenza

What is it?

Avian influenza, or “bird flu”, is a contagious viral infection that mainly affects birds. Domestic poultry flocks are especially vulnerable. Avian influenza is classified as low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) or highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) depending on the severity of illness it can cause in birds. Most strains of avian influenza are LPAI and cause mild illness in birds. HPAI can cause high rates of illness and death in birds and is of greater concern. Avian influenza can also be transmitted to other mammals such as dairy cattle, dogs, cats, or other wild mammal species. Human infections are rare and are usually because of close contact with infected poultry/other animals and/or their environment.

How is it spread?

- Close, unprotected contact (direct or indirect) with infected birds or their secretions (e.g., saliva, nasal secretions, carcasses, feathers, feces).
- Contact with environmental surfaces contaminated by infected animals (e.g., contaminated bedding, feed, or water troughs).
- Contact with, or consumption of, raw or under-cooked meat or related uncooked animal products (e.g., raw eggs, unpasteurized (raw) milk or raw milk products) from infected animals with influenza.
- In rare cases, humans can contract the virus through inhalation of dust containing the virus or by touching their eyes, nose, or mouth after handling contaminated surfaces.

What do I look for?

Some infected people may not develop symptoms at all. However, if symptoms develop, illness can range from mild to very severe, including death.

It usually takes from 1-5 days for symptoms to appear after exposure.

Symptoms often start with cough, shortness of breath, fever, aching muscles and headache. Other symptoms may also include diarrhea, runny nose, sore throat, fatigue, and red eyes.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



How is it treated?

There is no specific antiviral treatment for avian influenza, but antiviral drugs like oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) may be prescribed to reduce the severity and duration of symptoms. Rest, hydration, and over-the-counter medications to relieve symptoms, are also important.

Is there a vaccine effective against avian influenza in humans?

Currently, there are no avian influenza virus vaccines for humans. It is recommended to get the seasonal influenza vaccine to reduce the risk of getting avian influenza and seasonal influenza.

Do I have to be concerned about consuming poultry food products?

It is unlikely that you will get avian influenza by consuming poultry or eggs products. However, when handling food, you should follow proper safe food handling practices such as:

- Avoiding cross contamination by keeping poultry and egg products separate from other food products.
- Cooking poultry (ground or parts) to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).
- Cooking whole poultry to an internal temperature of 82°C (180°F).
- Cleaning and disinfecting contaminated equipment and work surfaces.

How can I protect myself?

- Frequently wash hands with soap and water, especially after contact with birds or their environments.
- Do not consume food or drink in animal areas and do not touch eyes, nose or mouth following contact with infected animals, or excretions/secretions, or their food products.
- Ensure proper training and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all workers who may come into close contact with infected birds. Use PPE such as masks and gloves when handling birds or cleaning contaminated areas.
- Farmers, workers, veterinarians, and emergency responders should avoid unprotected direct physical or close contact to infected animals, and/or contaminated environments/materials such as sick/dead livestock, carcasses, feces/litter, raw milk, surfaces and water that might be contaminated with animal excretions/secretions.
- Avoid handling carcasses and consumption of raw or uncooked meat or related uncooked food products, including unpasteurized (raw) milk or raw milk products from infected animals.
- Cook poultry, fowl and eggs thoroughly before consumption.

More information can be obtained from

Durham Health Connection Line
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