

Since 2003, a growing number of bird flu cases have been turning up among bird populations around the world. While the risk from bird flu is generally low to most people, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns that it is not a question of "if" we will be affected, but "when". DOE-ORO wants you to know that the first step you can do is to educate yourself and stay informed. Below is a list of frequently asked questions and CDC's answers.

1. What is the bird flu (avian influenza)?

Bird flu is a disease of wild and domesticated birds.

- This type of influenza can also infect other animals and people.
- Since the 1990s, bird flu outbreaks have occurred in eastern Asia.
- The virus is spreading to birds and other animals in new regions.

This virus has infected some people.

- Although rare, human cases have been reported in South East Asia.
- Most human cases probably came from direct contact with infected birds or their droppings.
- More than 100 people have gotten bird flu, and about half of them have died.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is watching closely for any person-to-person spread of bird flu.

- So far there has been limited person-to-person spread.
- CDC is watching for changes in the virus that could lead to easier spread.
- The US Department of Health and Human Services, and the World Health Organization, and many others are working together.

2. Can humans get infected from bird flu?

Although rare, human cases of bird flu have been reported.

- All human cases of bird flu have been in Asia and Eastern Europe.
- A few reports are linked to drinking uncooked poultry blood.
- Most human cases probably came from direct contact with infected birds or their droppings.
- So far there has been limited person-to-person spread.
- The few people who got bird flu from other people did not pass it on.

3. What are the symptoms of bird flu?

Symptoms of bird flu are like those for other influenza viruses.

- A high fever that lasts for several days.
- Muscle aches occur and feel worse if they are touched.
- Coughing and shortness of breath are common.

4. Will a seasonal flu vaccine protect me from bird flu?

Seasonal flu vaccines do not provide protection against the bird flu. However, getting a yearly "flu shot" for seasonal flu is recommended for many.

- Vaccination is recommended for the young, the old, and people they live with.
- Vaccination is recommended for health care workers.

- Vaccination is recommended for those with other health problems such as heart disease.

5. Is there a vaccine to protect humans from the bird flu?

Potential vaccines are already being made and tested against likely viruses.

- Researchers are making and testing small amounts of possible vaccines.
- Influenza viruses are being monitored for changes that would affect vaccine production.
- Research is underway on methods to make more vaccine more quickly.
- It is difficult to make large amounts of vaccine without knowing the exact pandemic influenza virus.

In a pandemic, the goal would be to vaccinate everyone.

- Vaccine might be in limited supply in the early stages of pandemic influenza.
- People who perform essential society services (for example, health care providers and police) will likely be the first vaccinated.
- Other groups will be identified for vaccination based on the pandemic.

6. What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak caused by a new influenza virus.

- The virus may spread easily, possibly causing serious illness and death
- Because so many people are at risk, serious consequences are possible.
- Historically, pandemic influenza has caused widespread harm and death

7. What would make the bird flu a pandemic flu?

Scientists are concerned that “bird flu” (H5N1 avian influenza) in Asia could change, causing pandemic influenza.

- The virus is spreading to birds and other animals in new regions.
- The virus has infected some people, causing severe illness and death.
- In rare cases the virus has spread from one person to another.

The United States and other countries are preparing to respond to pandemic influenza.

- The Department of Health and Human Services and others are developing supplies of vaccines and medicines.
- The US has been working with the World Health Organization and other countries to strengthen detection and response to outbreaks.
- Preparedness efforts are ongoing at the national, state, and local level.

8. How is pandemic flu different from the seasonal flu?

Pandemic influenza is different from seasonal influenza (or “the flu”).

- Seasonal outbreaks of the flu are caused by viruses that are already among people.
- Pandemic influenza is caused by an influenza virus that is new to people.
- Pandemic influenza is likely to affect many more people than seasonal influenza.
- Pandemic influenza may begin with an existing influenza virus that has changed.
- Fewer people would be immune to a new influenza virus.
- Pandemic influenza could severely affect a broader set of the population, including young adults.

- A severe pandemic could change daily life for a time, including limitations on travel and public gatherings.

9. Have there been flu pandemics before?

Influenza pandemics have occurred throughout recorded history.

- About 30 influenza pandemics have been recorded.
- There were three influenza pandemics in the last century.
- The most recent influenza pandemic was Hong Kong Influenza in 1968-69.

The severity of influenza pandemics has varied.

- The 1918 pandemic killed tens of millions of people worldwide.
- Deaths from the 1968-69 Pandemic were about the same as for seasonal influenza.
- Severe pandemics can have severe adverse effects on the economy and daily life.

It is difficult to predict how the next influenza pandemic will compare to the past.

- The severity of a pandemic influenza will depend on the virus that causes it.
- Increased travel and greater populations could speed the spread of pandemic influenza.
- Better detection and medical treatments could lessen the effects of an influenza pandemic.