



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department  
**BIRD FLU (Avian Influenza)**  
(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

**What is Bird Flu (Avian Influenza)?**

Bird Flu is an infection caused by bird flu viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually don't get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them.

**Do bird flu viruses infect humans?**

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but several cases where humans have been infected with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997.

**What are the symptoms of bird flu in humans?**

Symptoms of bird flu in humans have ranged from general flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory problems, and other severe and life-threatening problems. The symptoms of bird flu may depend on which virus caused the infection.

**How is the bird flu spread?**

1. Infected birds spread the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces.
2. Other birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions.

It is believed that most cases of bird flu infection in humans has been the result of contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. The spread of bird flu viruses from one sick person to another has been reported very rarely, and the virus is not known to have spread beyond one person.



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**How is bird flu in humans treated?**

People infected with bird flu can become very sick. Treatment may include hospitalization, supportive care drugs called antivirals. But antivirals must be started within 48 hours symptoms beginning. However, flu viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so they may not always work. There is currently no licensed vaccine to prevent the bird flu.

**What is the risk to humans from bird flu?**

The risk from bird flu is relatively low to most people because the viruses occur mainly among birds and do not usually infect humans. However, during an outbreak of bird flu among domesticated chickens, ducks, and turkeys, there is a possible risk to people who have contact with infected birds or surfaces that have been contaminated with excretions from infected birds.

**Is there a vaccine to protect humans from the kind of bird flu virus that is in Asia and Europe?**

At this time, there is no vaccine available to protect humans against the kind of bird flu virus that is being seen in Asian and Europe. However, there are efforts in place to create a vaccine.

**How can I reduce my risk?**

You would take the same steps you would to protect yourself and your family from colds and other flu viruses.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently throughout the day, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home from work or school when you are sick.