

**AVIAN FLU INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS
PROVIDED BY SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES
In Consultation with Multnomah County Health Department**

What is Avian Flu?

Avian flu (“bird flu”) is an infectious disease of birds caused by types of viruses that affect birds. All bird species are thought to be susceptible to these viral infections, especially domestic poultry including chickens and turkeys. Migratory waterfowl are the natural reservoir of avian influenza viruses.

Avian flu is spread among birds through virus in the infected birds’ saliva, nasal secretions and feces. Fecal-to-oral transmission is the most common mode of spread between birds.

The first documented infection of humans with the avian influenza virus occurred in Hong Kong in 1997, causing severe respiratory disease in 18 humans. The investigation of this outbreak determined that close direct contact with live infected poultry with the virus was the source of human infection.

What is the current situation?

The outbreak in Asia has prompted concern about the potential for another worldwide flu epidemic, also known as a “pandemic.” Flu pandemics occur periodically and are part of the broader pattern of human health and disease. There have been three pandemics in the last century: 1918, 1957 and 1968.

Type H5N1 bird influenza is of concern because of its spread to poultry flocks in SE Asia, Indonesia, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Romania. This strain of flu is severe when it affects people. Symptoms range from typical flu-like symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches to eye infections, pneumonia and severe respiratory distress. To date, 60 of the 117 humans infected have died. Almost all of these people who have gotten avian influenza had contact with infected poultry by directly handling infected birds.

Because all influenza viruses have the ability to change, scientists are concerned that the H5N1 virus one day could be able to spread easily from one person to another.

What is the risk for Oregonians at this time?

Public health agencies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, State and County Health Departments) have been monitoring this situation since 2004.

There have been no cases of birds or humans infected with the H5N1 virus in the United States. Little or no evidence exists at this time that transmission takes place from person to person. The concern for a pandemic centers on the virus changing or mutating. Turkeys and chickens in this country are safe to eat. Cooking kills the virus.

People who travel to countries with known outbreaks may be at risk and should take precautions to avoid contact with birds in live food markets and eat only well cooked poultry.

Is there a plan for emergencies?

There is coordinated effort to improve regional emergency preparedness and response. Public health agencies and health care systems are working together to create practical and effective public health and medical care responses to pandemic influenza. The plans address:

- Increased hospital and clinic capacity to care for additional patients.
- Developing special “stand-alone” treatment centers.
- Effective communication with the culturally defined communities as well as the general public.
- Behavior health services to meet the needs of anxious and stressed individuals.
- Mass capacity for prevention through vaccination and medication distribution.
- Systems for closure of schools and businesses, and limiting public gatherings.

What can the public do?

- Stay home and away from other people if you are exposed and or ill. Isolation and limited voluntary quarantine were successful in controlling the SARS epidemic.
- Get a flu shot! There is value in keeping healthy and to discourage any co-infection.
- Increase social distance. Flu is spread within three feet.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing. Wash your hands frequently, especially after sneezing, coughing, and blowing your nose.
- Maintain a healthy immune system: quit smoking, eat a well-balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, exercise regularly, sleep 7-8 hours every night, get regular medical checkups and keep your immunizations up to date.

What can parents do?

- Check your child’s immunization records and be sure they are up to date.
- Keep your child home if he/she is ill.
- Teach “cover your cough”, good and frequent handwashing, no sharing of food and drink or utensils.
- Make sure all contact and emergency contact information is correct for school or day care.
- Discuss any health problems your child has with the school nurse.
- Read information your child brings home from school and call the school if you have any questions.

What can school districts do?

- Be prepared for *any* emergency situation (earthquake, fire, etc.) and follow district and building protocols.
- Review evacuation plans and include accountability for students and staff, and volunteers in the building.
- Review parent notification protocols for emergencies. Have a plan for students whose parents cannot be contacted in an emergency.
- Request consultation from local and county emergency response agencies if you have concerns about your emergency plans.
- Review safety/emergency response team duties and introduce the team members to the staff and volunteers.
- Follow any directions from local and state officials.

Please be aware that local, state, and federal health agencies will keep the public informed when new information becomes available as well as any actions that need to be taken. More detailed information can be found at:

Multnomah County Health Department
<http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/>
 Oregon Department of Human Services
www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/index.shtml

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen>
 World Health Organization
http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/avian_faqs/en/index.html