

Pandemic Influenza Questions and Answers

1. What is a pandemic and how can it happen in our society?

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A pandemic influenza occurs when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, begins to cause serious illness, and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide.

2. Will a pandemic influenza occur? If so, when will it happen?

Many scientists believe it is a matter of time until the next influenza pandemic occurs. However, the timing and severity of the next pandemic cannot be predicted. Influenza pandemics occurred three times in the past century — in 1918-19, 1957-58, and 1968-69.

3. What is avian influenza (bird flu)?

Avian influenza is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These influenza viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, avian influenza is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them. Influenza A (H5N1) virus is an influenza A virus subtype that has been infecting birds and causing transmission to humans.

4. How do people become infected with avian influenza viruses?

Although avian influenza (bird flu) viruses do not usually infect humans, a number of confirmed cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997. These cases of H5N1 avian influenza infection in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry (e.g., domesticated chicken, ducks, and turkeys) or surfaces possibly contaminated from feces of infected birds. For a pandemic of influenza to occur, avian influenza must mutate/change to be able to be passed easily from person to person.

5. How many people have become infected with the avian influenza virus?

The World Health Organization (WHO) maintains situation updates and cumulative reports of human cases of avian influenza A (H5N1). This information is available at <http://pandemicflu.gov/#map>.

6. What are the symptoms of avian influenza in humans?

People infected with the current strand of the avian virus (H5N1) have shown everything from typical human influenza-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases, and other life-threatening complications. Symptoms of avian influenza may depend on which specific virus subtype and strain caused the infection.

7. How is avian influenza in humans treated?

Supportive care is important, as it is for annual influenza. Laboratory studies suggest that two prescription medicines approved for human influenza viruses, Tamiflu™ and Relenza™, may work in treating avian influenza infection in humans. Since influenza viruses can become drug resistant, clinical trials involving people with H5N1 are needed to see how effective they will actually be.

8. What are pandemic alert phases and what phase are we in?

The World Health Organization (WHO) developed an alert system (http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/phase/en/index.html) to help inform the world about the seriousness of a pandemic. The alert system has six phases, with Phase 1 having the lowest risk of human cases and Phase 6 posing the greatest risk of pandemic. The world is presently in **Phase 3** of the Pandemic Alert. This means that there is a new influenza virus subtype causing disease in humans, but is not yet spreading in an efficient (easily transmittable) and sustainable manner among humans.

9. Is there a risk for becoming infected with avian influenza by eating poultry and eggs?

There is no evidence that properly cooked poultry can be a source of infection for avian influenza viruses. Cooking poultry to an internal temperature of 165 °F kills the avian influenza virus. In addition, eggs from infected poultry could also be contaminated with the virus and therefore care should be taken in handling eggs or raw egg products. Commercial mayonnaise, dressings, and sauces that contain pasteurized eggs are safe to eat. Following good hygiene and food safety practices will reduce the risk of infection.

10. Does the current seasonal influenza vaccine protect me from avian influenza?

No. Influenza vaccine for the 2005-06 season does not provide protection against avian influenza.

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11. Is there a vaccine to protect humans from H5N1 virus?

There currently is no commercially available vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 virus that is being detected in Asia and Europe. However, vaccine development efforts are taking place. Research studies to test a vaccine that will protect humans against H5N1 virus began in April 2005, and a series of clinical trials is under way. For more information about the H5N1 vaccine development process, visit the [National Institutes of Health website](#).

12. Are my pets at risk from this new H5N1 strain of avian influenza?

The avian influenza A (H5N1) virus that emerged in Asia in 2003 has been documented to infect other species (e.g. cats, tigers, leopards, stone martens). This has raised concern that this strain of avian influenza A (H5N1) virus may be capable of infecting other animals. As a general rule, pet owners should take steps to insure that pets do not interact with wildlife.

13. Are there travel restrictions to areas with known H5N1 outbreaks?

The US does not recommend any travel restrictions to affected countries at this time. However, CDC currently advises that travelers to countries with known outbreaks of H5N1 influenza avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. For more information, visit CDC's [Travelers' Health](#)

14. What is the US government doing to help protect Americans?

The US government has implemented importation restrictions on poultry from affected areas and has increased surveillance of wild and domestic bird populations. In addition, in the event of a pandemic, certain public health measures will be taken to help contain or limit the spread of infection as effectively as possible. Some of the measures will include; treating sick and exposed people with antivirals, identifying and quarantining exposed people, and canceling public events and restricting travel.

15. What is FAU doing to prepare and respond to a possible influenza pandemic?

A Pandemic Preparedness Committee has been established to develop policy and procedures that will assist the campus community to develop pandemic emergency plans. A forum on Avian Influenza will take place in the near future. Additional information can be found at <http://uavp.fau.edu/ehs/?div=AvianFlu>