

Avian Influenza (Flu) and International Travel

A message on Avian Flu to CSU students, faculty, and staff studying and traveling abroad.

Avian flu has received worldwide attention from national and international public health officials. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Department of State continue to carefully monitor avian flu. They have not issued any travel warnings regarding avian flu. Currently there is not a pandemic of influenza of any type. As a precaution, however, the Travel Medicine Clinic at Hartshorn Health Services at CSU is providing you with factual information about avian flu.

Hartshorn Health Services Avian Flu planning is and will be guided by CDC and WHO guidelines and is part of the university's larger planning. See www.safety.colostate.edu.

Information about Avian Flu

What is Avian Flu? Avian Influenza, also known as H5N1 and bird flu, is a potential concern due to outbreaks originating in Asia and spreading slowly to other parts of the world. Avian flu is an infectious disease caused by viruses that infect birds, and less commonly, pigs and other mammals. It is present in the droppings of birds, especially chickens. Sporadic human cases have occurred after direct contact with poultry. The risk to travelers is small, but it is important to avoid poultry farms and live animal markets. Well-cooked chicken is safe to eat. What is the difference between Avian Flu, Seasonal Flu and Pandemic Flu? Avian Influenza is an infection caused by bird flu viruses. Avian Influenza A (H5N1) viruses usually affect wild birds but now are infecting and causing serious and widespread disease among poultry, such as chickens, mostly in Southeast Asia and more recently parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Human infections with H5N1 viruses are rare, but have occurred during the last three years in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Turkey, and China, with many cases resulting in death. Most cases of H5N1 infection in humans are thought to have occurred from direct contact with infected poultry in the affected countries in Asia. There have also been rare, isolated cases of H5N1 spread from human to human.

Seasonal influenza (often called 'the flu') is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Seasonal flu occurs every year and can cause mild to severe illness in people. The best protection against seasonal flu is vaccination, and hand washing.

An influenza pandemic would be a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new 'influenza A' virus appears or emerges in the human population, causes serious illness in people, and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide. Currently, there is not a pandemic of influenza of any type. There is no pandemic of avian flu since widespread human to human spread of avian influenza has not occurred.

How is Avian Flu treated? At this time, there is no definitive treatment for Avian Flu. There are antiviral medications, such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®), which have shown potential for treating this virus, but it is doubtful that they will be available and effective for treating large numbers of people in the event of a pandemic. It is also highly doubtful that a vaccine could be produced quickly enough to be useful for preventing cases of Avian Flu. Treatment consists of symptomatic treatment with fever reducers such as Acetaminophen and Ibuprofen, drinking lots of fluids, and taking cough syrup or other nonprescription medications for cough or body aches. Sometimes a secondary bacterial infection, such as sinusitis or pneumonia, develops after an episode of influenza, and these infections can be treated with antibiotics if needed. The lack of an effective treatment for Avian Flu underscores the need for prevention-by practicing good infection control techniques (such as basic handwashing and cough etiquette), being familiar with social isolation measures, and being prepared for major disruption of daily activities.

Rising Concern

A rising concern is that avian and human flu viruses can exchange genes when a person is simultaneously infected with viruses from both species, which can give rise to a new subtype of the flu virus. If a new flu virus emerges, it is possible that few humans will have natural immunity and existing vaccines would not be effective against this new subtype. Preventive and preparedness measures should be continued because of a possibility of an avian flu pandemic.

Where to find information

We recommend that you visit the CDC's Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov>), bookmark it in your Web browser, and refer to it whenever you have a question. The site is clear, authoritative, comprehensive and current. Information is also available on the official U.S. government website on pandemic flu and avian influenza:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>, as well as from the World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/en/>.

Travel Suggestions

Listed below are recommendations from the CDC Website.

The CDC has not recommended that the general public avoid travel to any of the countries affected by H5N1. Persons visiting areas with reports of outbreaks of H5N1 among poultry or of human H5N1 cases can reduce their risk of infection by observing the following measures.

Before any international travel to an area affected by H5N1 Avian Influenza:

- * Visit CDC's Travelers' Health website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel> to educate yourself and others who may be traveling with you about any disease risks and CDC health recommendations for international travel in areas you plan to visit. For other information about avian influenza, see CDC's Avian Influenza website: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>.
- * Be sure you are up to date with all your routine vaccinations, and see your doctor or health-care provider, ideally 4-6 weeks before travel, to get any additional vaccination medications or information you may need.
- * Assemble a travel health kit containing basic first aid and medical supplies. Be sure to include a thermometer and alcohol-based hand gel for hand hygiene. See the Travelers Health Kit page in 'Health Information for International Travel' for other suggested items.
- * Identify in-country health-care resources in advance of your trip.
- * Check your health insurance plan or get additional insurance that covers medical evacuation in case you become sick. Information about medical evacuation services is provided on the U.S. Department of State web page Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad, at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html

During travel to an affected area:

- * Avoid all direct contact with poultry, including touching well-appearing, sick, or dead chickens and ducks. Avoid places such as poultry farms and markets where live or recently killed poultry are raised, kept, or sold and avoid handling surfaces contaminated with poultry feces or secretions.
- * As with other infectious illnesses, one of the most important preventive practices is careful and frequent hand washing. Cleaning your hands often with soap and water removes potentially infectious material from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission. Waterless alcohol-based hand gels may be used when soap is not available and hands are not visibly soiled.
- * Influenza viruses are destroyed by heat; therefore, as a precaution, all foods from poultry, including eggs and poultry blood, should be thoroughly cooked.
- * If during your travel you become aware (through newspaper or television reports) that there has been sustained human to human transmission of avian flu and global or local alerts are being made, you should contact the U.S. consular office for assistance. They can help you determine what you may need to do regarding international transportation which could be affected. They can also assist you in obtaining medical care in the event that you require it.

After your return:

- * Monitor your health for 10 days.
- * If you become ill with a fever plus a cough, sore throat or trouble breathing during this 10-day period, consult a health-care provider. Before you visit a health-care setting, tell the provider the following: 1) your symptoms, 2) where you traveled, and 3) if you have had direct contact with poultry or close contact with a severely ill person. This way, he or she can be aware that you have traveled to an area reporting avian influenza. Do not travel while ill, unless you are seeking medical care. Limiting contact with others as much as possible can help prevent the spread of an infectious illness.