

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT AVIAN INFLUENZA

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza (AI), a virus commonly known as the “bird flu,” is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus.

How is AI spread?

Experts believe AI is being spread primarily through wild migratory waterfowl and backyard flocks. The virus can also be spread from infected flocks to other farms via contaminated equipment, clothing and shoes, cages or transportation vehicles.

Could what is happening in Asia happen here?

It is unlikely that a similar scale outbreak could occur in the United States. The U.S. has significant biosecurity measures in place for managing such an outbreak and follows international guidelines for the destruction and disposal of infected birds. In addition, standard systems for raising commercial poultry in the U.S. prevent the birds from having direct contact with the waste of wild birds and waterfowl, cited as one of the major sources of AI.

Can humans contract the disease?

Yes, but only through direct contact with infected birds, their blood or saliva, or their manure, and only if those birds are infected with specific “high-path” strains that can infect humans. Very few of the avian strains are transmittable to humans.

What preventive measures are in place to protect Ohioans from this disease and to prevent the disease from spreading to other flocks?

Ohio poultry producers in cooperation with university and state poultry health experts developed an emergency disease plan that will be activated if the disease appears in the US. In addition, a number of strict biosecurity guidelines are employed on Ohio’s farms, including:

- Veterinary monitoring programs;
- Restricting access to poultry facilities to essential personnel only;
- Prohibiting employees from keeping wild birds or handling birds off the premises of the poultry operation;
- Prohibiting employees from visiting more than one poultry barn in a multi-house complex on a given day; and
- Using protective gear, such as biosecurity suits (coveralls) and shoe covers, at all times.

Can I catch AI from eating eggs, turkey or chicken?

Eating properly handled and cooked eggs and poultry is safe. If highly pathogenic avian flu were detected in the U.S., the chance of infected poultry entering the human food chain would be extremely low. Even if it did, proper cooking kills this virus just as it does many other disease organisms and parasites. As a reminder, however, all eggs and poultry products should be handled properly and cooked thoroughly at the recommended temperatures to reduce the risk of food-borne illnesses.

Is AI a problem in Ohio? Could it be?

No outbreaks of high-path, reportable strains of AI have been documented in Ohio to date, underscoring the value of effective biosecurity programs. Cage and confinement systems used by most of Ohio’s chicken, turkey and egg producers prevent domestic poultry from having direct contact with free-flying birds.

In addition, Ohio has regulations already in place that allow the refusal of poultry imports from quarantined farms. There is also a long-standing state requirement that all livestock and poultry brought into Ohio have a certificate of veterinary inspection to make sure they are disease free.

What are the symptoms of avian influenza?

Symptoms of avian influenza in humans have ranged from typical human influenza-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress syndrome), and other severe complications.

What happens to people who get avian influenza?

Like any strain of influenza, avian influenza can be serious if not treated. Those who believe they might be infected should seek immediate medical attention for a proper diagnosis and treatment by a medical doctor.

Does Ohio import chickens or turkeys from Asian countries?

No. Trade restrictions are in place to ensure that infected birds do not enter Ohio’s poultry populations.

Information provided by:



*phone (614) 882-6111
fax (614) 882-9444
www.ohiopoultry.org*