Questions and Answers

**Will bird flu cause the next influenza pandemic?**

Avian influenza (bird flu) is a disease of wild and farm birds caused by avian influenza viruses. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but since 1997 there have been a number of confirmed cases of human infection from bird flu viruses. Most of these resulted from direct or close contact with infected birds (for example: domesticated chickens, ducks, and turkeys). It is important not to handle, play with, or pick up dead birds. Information on who to contact in your state is at: [http://www.pandemicflu.gov/state/statecontacts.htm](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/state/statecontacts.htm)

The spread of bird flu viruses from an infected person to another person has been reported very rarely and has not been reported to continue beyond one person. A worldwide pandemic could occur if a bird flu virus were to change so that it could easily be passed from person to person. Experts around the world are watching for changes in bird flu viruses that could lead to an influenza pandemic.

**Is it safe to eat poultry?**

Yes, it is safe to eat properly cooked poultry. Cooking destroys germs, including bird flu viruses. The United States maintains trade restrictions on the importation of poultry and poultry products from countries where the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza strain has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised poultry, not in wild or migratory birds.

Guidelines for the safe preparation of poultry include the following:

- Wash hands before and after handling food.
- Keep raw poultry and its juices away from other foods.
- Keep hands, utensils, and surfaces, such as cutting boards, clean.
- Use a food thermometer to ensure food has reached the safe internal temperature – in all parts of the bird. Cook poultry to at least 165°F to kill food-borne germs that might be present, including the avian influenza virus.

For more information, see poultry preparation fact sheets at: [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Poultry_Preparation_Fact_Sheets/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Poultry_Preparation_Fact_Sheets/index.asp)
What types of birds can carry bird flu viruses?

Avian influenza viruses can infect chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, and guinea fowl, as well as a wide variety of other birds, including migratory waterfowl.

Each year, there is a flu season for birds just as there is for humans and, as with people, some forms of the flu are worse than others, depending on how strong the virus. A weak virus may cause only mild illness in infected poultry and birds but a strong virus could cause severe and extremely contagious illness, and even death, among infected poultry and birds.

Will the seasonal flu shot protect me against pandemic influenza?

- No, it won’t protect you against pandemic influenza. But flu shots can help you to avoid seasonal flu.
- Get a flu shot to help protect you from seasonal flu.
- Get a pneumonia shot to prevent secondary infection if you are over the age of 65 or have a chronic illness such as diabetes or asthma. For specific guidelines, talk to your health care provider or call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hotline at 1-800-232-4636.
- Make sure that your family’s immunizations are up-to-date.

What is the U.S. government doing to prepare for pandemic influenza?

The U.S. government has been preparing for pandemic influenza for several years. In November 2005, the President announced the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza. Ongoing preparations include the following:

- Monitoring migratory and wild birds for avian flu.
- Working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other nations to help detect human cases of bird flu and respond to an influenza pandemic, if one begins.
- Supporting the manufacturing and testing of influenza vaccines, including finding more reliable and quicker ways to make large quantities of vaccines through cell-based technologies.
- Developing a national stockpile of antiviral drugs to help treat and control the spread of disease.
- Supporting the efforts of federal, state, tribal, and local health agencies to prepare for and respond to pandemic influenza, including hosting planning summits with state and local leaders in each state.
- Working with federal agencies to prepare and to encourage communities, businesses, and organizations to plan for pandemic influenza. These efforts have included joint exercises in pandemic preparation.