

## The ABC's of Avian (Bird) Flu

Avian (bird) flu is a disease of wild and farm birds caused by influenza viruses. Since 1997, a number of human cases have occurred mostly with those who had direct contact with infected waterfowl or other infected poultry, or through contact with cages, water or feed that was contaminated.

To date, the spread of avian virus from one infected person to another has been very rare and has not continued beyond one person. However, if the virus were to change or mutate it could become contagious between persons and a worldwide pandemic could result. Many experts from around the world are watching closely for such mutations or changes in bird flu viruses that could ultimately lead to a global pandemic.

If infected, humans experience symptoms ranging from typical human influenza-like symptoms, which can include fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches, to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases and other severe and life-threatening complications.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through its National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), is developing pre-pandemic vaccines based on current strains of avian flu viruses. NIAID is also doing research in the development of new types of influenza vaccines.

### *Pandemic Influenza - Plan and Be Prepared*

In the event of a world-wide pandemic, high levels of illness, death, social disruption and economic loss would be seen. The best advice in dealing with the threat of a pandemic is to become informed and be prepared. Every individual and family should know both the magnitude of what can happen during a pandemic outbreak and what actions they can take to help lessen the impact.

To plan and be prepared it is recommended that you:

- Store several weeks worth of extra food, water and other supplies for use on a day-to-day basis
- Have adequate supplies of prescription and flu-relief medications on hand
- Plan with your family on how best to care for each other should infection occur
- Consider volunteering on a community level to assist with pandemic preparedness and response

To limit the spread of germs and prevent infection:

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues
- Stay away from others who are sick

In addition, create a family emergency plan by identifying and recording the blood type of each family member, any allergies, past or current medical conditions, current medications and dosages, and a list of emergency contacts.

For further information and help in preparing for the threat of avian flu, go to [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov). Additionally, the [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int) (WHO) maintains an up-to-date "Influenza Pandemic Threat: Current Situation" [web page](#). The WHO website also offers basic facts as well as information on vaccine and drug preparedness measures.

