

Avian Influenza A (H5N1) and the University Community

Questions and Answers

(updated August 1, 2006)

The University of Florida is keenly aware of your concerns about Avian Influenza A (H5N1). This document has been prepared by staff from the Student Health Care Center (SHCC) to inform you about proactive steps the University is taking to protect the health of students and employees.

The University will continue to work closely with local and state health authorities to monitor the Avian Influenza situation locally and abroad and will post updates to this Q/A format on www.shcc.ufl.edu regularly.

1. What is the best way to stay up-to-date about Avian Flu and the H5N1 virus?

To stay abreast of the latest information, monitor the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health organization (WHO) websites:

- <http://www.cdc.gov>
- <http://www.who.int/>

The SHCC will also keep their website (www.shcc.ufl.edu) current with new information.

2. How can students and employees protect themselves from Avian Flu and other infectious diseases?

- Good hand washing and hygiene is the best defense against infectious disease transmission. Wash hands often and always before eating, with soap and water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid open air markets where poultry may be sold.
- Observe wildlife from a distance and avoid contact with wild birds, dead or alive.
- Cook all wild game or poultry thoroughly before eating. (There is no evidence that properly cooked poultry or eggs can be a source of infection.)
- Cover mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing, and then wash hands.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils and drinking after others.
- Eat nutritiously, get adequate & regular sleep, stay well hydrated and avoid alcohol, tobacco products and drugs keeps as these behaviors contribute to the optimal functioning of your immune system.

- 3. What is the real situation with human infections from Avian Influenza virus?**
Avian Influenza (H5N1) is a highly contagious influenza A virus subtype that occurs in wild birds and can be deadly to >90% of those infected birds within 48 hours. It typically does not infect humans; however from 1997 when the first human case was detected to present, ~226 human cases have been reported. Most of these human cases have been associated with either direct or sustained close contact with infected poultry or contact with surfaces contaminated by secretions from infected birds and poultry.

So far the spread of H5N1 virus from person to person has been limited however scientists are concerned that the virus will change and one day will infect humans and be spread more easily from one person to another, since humans have little to no immune protection from this specific virus.

- 4. What is the most recent update on the availability of a vaccine to prevent Avian Influenza?**
There is currently no commercially available vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 virus; however vaccine development and clinical trials are in process. For more information about vaccine development visit the national Institutes of Healthy website at: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/dmid/influenza/>

- 5. What symptoms would a person develop if they were to become ill with an Avian Influenza (H5N2) viral infection? Is there effective medication for treatment of Avian Influenza?**
Symptoms of Avian Influenza infection have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms of sudden cough, sore throat and muscle aches with high fevers to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory disease, and other severe and life threatening complications. A laboratory test is necessary to confirm Avian Flu in humans. Currently studies done in laboratories suggest that certain prescription anti-viral medications may work to treat humans infected with the virus; however more studies need to be done to demonstrate the effectiveness of these medications.

- 6. What precautions is the University taking to prevent Avian Flu on campus?**
The University endorses the current CDC and WHO guidelines in place and will continue to work closely with local and state public health authorities to monitor the world-wide situation regarding Avian Influenza.

Additionally, the University is educating students and employees and especially travelers with up-to-date printed and web based health alerts such as this Q/A format. These health alerts focus on personal health and prevention of disease transmission and are distributed to students and employees planning summer travel abroad. The University, in collaboration with local, state and federal health authorities, has a prevention response plan developed and ready for implementation should the threat of avian flu become a reality.