

Animal Care & Control



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

BIRD FLU IN CHICKENS

Q: Is Bird Flu contagious from wild birds?

A: At this time, there have not been any reports of humans getting bird flu from a wild bird or from another type of animal except poultry. Almost all of the cases of bird flu in humans have been in people who have had extensive contact with live domestic poultry, either in live animal markets or in poultry production facilities. Although it is spread to domestic birds via wild birds, the migratory patterns of wild birds in this country (north to south) will probably limit the spread across the United States if it ever arrives here.

Q: What are the signs of Bird Flu in birds?

A: The signs of bird flu in chickens and other fowl are similar to other respiratory diseases. The birds will have discharge from their eyes and nose, swollen sinuses, and a fluffed-up appearance. In more severe cases, the bird may suddenly die or have swelling of the head, comb, legs, feet along with a blue coloration of their mucus membranes. If the bird survives these stages, it can progress to a neurologic stage, which is characterized by incoordination and head-tilt. People should avoid handling or touching fowl that are displaying any of these symptoms.

Q: Can I catch Bird Flu from eating meat from infected poultry?

A: Cooking the meat will kill the virus if a chicken or duck is indeed infected. At this time, there is no reported bird flu of H5N1 strain in U.S. poultry. The U.S. doesn't import domestic poultry from any country except Canada, and that is only a very small number of birds brought in per year.

Q: My neighbor has some chickens in their back yard. Are they safe?

A: Yes, domestic U.S. poultry is safe to handle and be around at this time. For sanitary reasons, you should wash your hands after handling any poultry.

Q: Is it safe to be around flocks of wild birds? How about flocks of poultry?

A: Yes, at this time, it is safe to be around flocks of birds, both wild and domestic. Bird Flu has not been seen in the United States in either wild or domestic birds. Since our wild birds migrate north to south, it is unlikely that infected wild birds from Asia will migrate to the United States.

Q: Is it safe to dispose of a dead wild bird?

A: It is legal to dispose of dead wild birds in the trash, provided they are pigeon-sized or smaller. Other dead wild birds should be reported to Animal Care and Control or the Health Department. Both these agencies send birds in for West Nile Virus testing (a disease which is currently seen in California). When handling a dead bird, use rubber gloves. Always wash your hands after contacting any dead animal.

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