



Bird flu and our health

What is bird flu?

Avian influenza or 'bird flu' is a highly infectious disease of birds.

What is H5N1?

H5N1 is a strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

The H5N1 strain is causing concern worldwide because no other highly pathogenic avian influenza virus has spread so far or persisted so widely. To date it has killed more than 240 people.

Humans and bird flu

People are not usually affected by bird flu. However, the H5N1 strain can on rare occasions infect people who come into very close contact with sick or dead birds.

The World Health Organization is concerned the H5N1 strain could, in the future, develop the ability to spread from human to human, potentially causing a human flu pandemic. Even so, at this time, there is no evidence of sustained human to human transmission.

H5N1 is not present in Australia and the risk of it reaching Australia is low, but bird diseases in general can still pose a health risk to people. For this reason it's essential to practise good hygiene.

Practise good hygiene

Always thoroughly wash your hands with soap and hot water or disinfectant after handling birds. If you are cleaning cages or yards wear gloves and wash your clothes afterwards.

Droppings, clothing, footwear, skin, mucus, animal bedding, feed and water containers, cages, vehicles and farming equipment can all carry disease.

Always wash your hands and kitchenware properly with soap and hot water or disinfectant after contact with raw poultry products.

It is safe to eat properly cooked eggs, meat and poultry products. However, freezing infected poultry does not kill the disease.

More information

Information about avian influenza in general is available at www.daff.gov.au/birdflu
Public health information about avian influenza is available at www.health.gov.au