



TECHNICAL REPORT

ECDC SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

Avian influenza: Guidance for National Authorities to Produce Messages for the Public Concerning the Protection of Vulnerable Groups
Version February 2006

Avian influenza: Guidance for national authorities to produce messages for the public concerning the protection of vulnerable groups

The human cases of H5N1 avian influenza seen in Turkey and Iraq this winter have reminded us that this virus can pose a serious health risk to people who have close contact with infected birds. The presence of H5N1 now in birds within the Union makes this even more of an EU public health issue. The question of how to communicate about these risks was discussed by public health officials from across the EU at a meeting of the Health Security Committee in January 2006. ECDC was asked to formulate some science based messages for the “at risk” populations, in particular, people who keep birds around their house (e.g. backyard flocks of hens, ducks or geese).

This paper is based on the state of scientific knowledge in mid-February 2006 – it may need to be reviewed as our understanding of avian influenza develops. The aim is to finalise this guidance at a meeting of the EU’s Health Security Committee in March.

As well as circulation to the Health Security Committee and the EU’s EWRS Committee, this interim guidance has been sent to Ministers of Health and Chief Medical Officers in the EU and EEA Member States and the ECDC’s Management Board. The Management Board brings together senior health officials from Member States and the European Commission and representatives of the European Parliament.

1. SUGGESTED KEY MESSAGES FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- The threat to human health from “bird flu” (influenza virus type A/H5N1) is currently very low but not zero.
- “Bird flu” is an influenza virus found in birds. It is only people who have close contact with infected birds or with their droppings and other body fluids (e.g. blood, guts) from infected birds that are at risk from bird flu. There is no evidence of any sustained human-to-human transmission.
- Though for most people the risk of catching “bird flu” from birds is close to zero, following a few simple precautions can minimise the risk to you and your family still further:
 - o If you see dead or sick birds, do not touch them yourself, but inform the veterinary authorities
 - o Warn your children against touching dead or sick birds and discourage them from playing with birds
 - o Wash your hands thoroughly with soap many times per day, especially before eating
- Hunters should be aware that they run a risk of being exposed to avian influenza if they hunt wild birds. Hunters should also be aware that hunting is banned in the 10 km zone surrounding any place where H5N1 avian influenza has been found.

2. SUGGESTED ADVICE TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

2.1 People who work on poultry farms

See ECDC guidelines on occupational exposure (paper 4).

2.2 People who keep domestic birds (chickens, ducks or geese near where they live)

Protecting your birds against avian influenza

- Ask the local veterinary authorities for advice on the level of risk in your area, and on the measures they suggest to minimise the possibility of your birds being infected.

Protecting yourself and your family

- Do not allow your birds into the house.

- Discourage children from playing with the birds. Forbid children from touching sick or dead birds. Teach them to tell adults quickly if birds are sick.

- Make sure that children always wash their hands before eating.

- If you notice sick or dead birds in your flock **do not** touch the birds yourself. Inform the veterinary authorities as soon as you can.

- If it is not possible for the veterinary service to come quickly, and you have to take care of sick birds yourself put on protective clothing:
 - o a gown or apron covering your body
 - o a hat covering your hair
 - o a mask or wet cloth over your mouth and nose
 - o goggles or glasses
 - o gloves
 - o boots

- If you need to dispose of a dead bird use gloves and a mask, bury it in a place which does not pose a risk to drinking water wells and other water sources. After this, immediately contact the veterinary services.

- Once you have finished having contact with sick or dead birds take off the clothes you were wearing, hat, goggles and mask/cloth last, and clean them

Technical Report | Version February 2006

Messages for the Public - Protection of Vulnerable Groups

using a disinfectant. Wash your hands thoroughly before you touch anything else.

- Humans get infected from sick birds, their droppings, or other fluids and secretions (e.g. blood, guts, feathers). Cages, shed equipment or places where infected birds have been kept can be a source of infection for several days.
- Use disinfectant to disinfect cages, cloths or equipments that have been in contact with infected birds. The veterinary or public health authorities in your country can advise on which types of product to use.
- Do not** eat sick wild, game and/or backyard birds or birds that have died from disease even if they are cooked and do not feed them to other animals or birds.
- If there have been sick birds in your backyard/hobby flock, and someone in the family becomes ill with fever, cough or a sore throat, contact a doctor immediately and let them know what has happened.