

Avian Influenza

An illness requiring airborne and contact precautions

This handout describes avian influenza and its symptoms. It explains how the flu is spread and how to keep it from spreading to others.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza (bird flu) is an infection caused by viruses. Wild birds carry the viruses, but usually do not get sick from them. But, bird flu spreads very easily among birds. It can make chickens, ducks, turkeys, and other tame birds very sick. It may even kill them.

Right now, bird flu viruses do not usually infect people, and do not spread easily among humans. But, all viruses have the ability to change. Several people have been infected with bird flu viruses since 1997. This is why doctors are concerned that a bird flu virus could one day infect humans and spread easily from one person to another.

Since humans do not usually get bird flu, we have little or no immune protection against the virus. If the virus were able to infect people and spread easily, a *pandemic* (worldwide outbreak of disease) could begin.

If you travel to places in Asia where bird flu has occurred, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises you to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that may be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals.

The Seattle/King County Health Department requires that doctors report anyone who is diagnosed with bird flu so that they can take steps to protect the community.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches. Some people have eye infections or even severe and life-threatening problems such as *pneumonia* (lung infection). The symptoms may depend on which virus caused the infection.

People with symptoms should:

- **Wear a mask**
- **Wash their hands often**



Bird flu causes fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches.



- **Place used tissues in wastebaskets when they come to the hospital or a clinic**

Pick up a free “Cover Your Cough” kit” at the Information Desk or clinic.

How is bird flu spread?

Infected birds shed the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Other birds become infected when they contact these body fluids, or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions. We believed that most cases of bird flu in humans occurred after someone came in contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces.

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus to when symptoms begin is about 1 to 4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

Tell your healthcare provider if you think you have the flu, and if you have traveled to an area where bird flu has occurred in humans.

How is it diagnosed?

It is very hard to tell bird flu from other viral or bacterial illnesses just from the symptoms. A virology test is needed for diagnosis.

How are others protected from the bird flu?

At UW Medical Center, we place an “Airborne and Contact Precautions” sign near the door of your room. This sign tells healthcare staff and your visitors to observe these precautions when caring for you.

If you are in airborne and contact precautions:

- Hospital staff will wear masks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves when providing care.
- Visitors who enter the room should wear gowns, gloves, and masks. They should also wash their hand when leaving
- **We advise hand washing for 15 seconds, using alcohol hand gels, and environmental cleanliness.**
- We will ask you to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas of the hospital for treatment. If you leave your room, we will ask you to wash your hands and wear a yellow gown, gloves, and a mask.
- Please do **not** use the nutrition rooms. When you want a snack or ice water, ask a member of your care team to bring it to you.



To Learn More

To learn more about bird flu, visit www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
206.598.6122

When can precautions be stopped?

Airborne and contact precautions for avian influenza may be stopped when you no longer have symptoms and the health department has approved. If your immune system is compromised, you may need to have a follow-up lab test showing that you are no longer infected with the virus.