

Questions & Sample Answers
ECHO-TV Show #15 – Avian Influenza “Bird Flu”
(Taping Date: Tuesday, December 20, 2005 / 3:00-8:00 pm)

1. What is avian Influenza? Is it the same thing as “Bird Flu”?

Answer:

- Avian influenza is a kind of flu that affects birds – both wild birds and birds we use for food, like chickens. “Avian flu” means more or less the same thing as “bird flu”
- There are many different kinds of avian flu. When the media talk about “avian flu,” they usually mean one particular kind of bird flu.”
- That one particular kind of bird flu has been making people sick in parts of Asia – in places like Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and China.
- Only about 130 people have gotten this kind of flu, over the last several years – but about half of them have died.
- So far, this kind of flu hasn’t shown up in the U.S. – in birds or in people.

2. Why are people so worried about avian Influenza?

Answer:

- Scientists are worried that this new kind of “bird flu” could cause a “pandemic.”
- A pandemic can happen when a completely new kind of flu comes along. Because it’s so new, our bodies aren’t able to fight it very well.
- That means it can spread around the world very quickly, and make many people sick.
- That’s happened three times over the last 90 years, and scientists believe it will happen again.
- The worst pandemic we know about happened in 1918. During that pandemic, over half a million people died here in the United States – and at least 25 million died throughout the world.

3. So are we in the middle of a pandemic?

Answer:

- No, we aren’t. So far, the kind of avian flu that’s making people sick in Asia hasn’t caused a pandemic.
- That’s partly because it’s very hard for people to get it from each other. Instead, they get it directly from birds – or bird droppings. That’s why so few people have gotten sick.
- That could change. Some types of flu can change very quickly and easily.
- If the flu that’s making people sick in Asia changes, so people can get it easily from each other, it could still cause a pandemic.
- However, some other kind of flu could also cause a pandemic some time in the future.

4. Are there any medicines or vaccines for avian Influenza?

Answer:

- You shouldn't count on having a vaccine – or a medicine you can take – for Avian flu.
- There is a vaccine the kind of Avian flu people are getting in Asia – but we don't have much of it, and it may not work if the Avian flu changes enough to cause a pandemic.
- There are also medicines that help with the “regular” flu that people get every winter. But again, we don't have enough of them for everybody to take in a pandemic – and they may not work if the flu changes enough to cause a pandemic.

5. What can I do, then, about avian influenza?

Answer:

- First of all, to help fight off the flu, keep yourself healthy – eat good food, get some exercise, and get enough sleep.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, and cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
- If you do get sick with the flu, stay home to avoid exposing others to the disease.
- If we ever have a pandemic – or some other kind of health emergency – watch TV and listen to the radio so you'll know what's going on.

6. Can I safely eat chicken – or any other kind of bird meat?

Answer:

- YES. Just be careful to cook the meat thoroughly before you eat it. That's something you should always do anyway.
- You should also clean your kitchen utensils thoroughly after you use them – and don't let anything touch food that's ready to eat after it has been in contact with any kind of raw meat.

7. Can I safely travel to countries in Asia where they have avian influenza?

Answer:

- Yes, but you may want to be careful about having any direct contact with live birds or their droppings, or with uncooked bird meat. Practice healthy habits like good handwashing while you're there.
- You should also check in with your doctor before you go – to get all of your shots up to date, get more information about traveling outside the U.S. As with any trip overseas, be sure your vaccines are up to date. Check with your doctor for current shots.

8. One more question based on show preparation December 6th, 2005.

Answer:

- Blank for answer based on input from show hosts, interpreters and Dr. Hull.

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