

Winter 2005 Wellness Article

One Flu Over...?

While the bird flu (Avian Influenza) has not yet been eradicated, studies show it is not necessarily spreading either. At least not by migratory patterns or human to human transmission.

The bird flu itself is not a new development, existing in animal populations for over a century. Our current raised concerns with the virus began in 1997 when it was discovered to have infected humans. Since then, it has spread to nearly 100 people, though never from one person to another. The virus remained contagious only within domestic flocks of poultry. Transmission to humans was typically a result of close contact with animal waste or secretions.

Symptoms resembled those typical of human influenza, but included further complications such as eye infections and pneumonia depending on the strain contracted. Additional studies are underway to improve the efficacy of medications, though current studies show that existing prescription medicines have been effective in treating the infection in humans.

The virus continues to be a threat to poultry farms, and anyone who relies on chickens, turkeys, or ducks as a source of income. European farmers have been known to abandon even healthy livestock for fear they may contract and transmit bird flu to other humans. Many farmers, especially those in smaller Asian villages, cannot afford measures to maintain proper hygiene among their animals, forcing EU governments to assist with subsidizing the cost of slaughter, cleansing, and disinfection. For farmers in the United States, spending on bio-security and antiviral measures is doubling and tripling.

Since early 2004, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) has been conducting preliminary research on possible vaccines as a preemptive measure in the event the strain develops the ability to spread from one human to another. The situation will continue to be closely monitored in Europe and Asia as well as the United States. Migratory patterns continue to show that birds themselves are not spreading the virus over any significant distance. Rather, shipment of the animals as cargo and exports may prove to be most the noticeable connection between effected areas.

The United States continues its ban on any poultry from those areas effected by any of the influenza viruses. This should serve as an assurance to those concerned about contracting the virus through cooking or preparation of poultry. While properly cooked meats have not been proven to pose any threats, preventing the spread of germs remains as important as always. Remember to cook all poultry products thoroughly before eating and to clean all utensils and surfaces that come in contact with raw poultry with soap and hot water immediately afterwards.

For more information, visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) online at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm> or its established avian flu public hotlines at **888-246-2675**; Spanish **888-246-2857**; and for Clinicians **877-246-4625**.

The information contained in this is for educational purposes only. This does not and cannot provide medical advice for any person, which requires direct medical care. It should not be used as a substitute for medical care and advice of your physician. There may be variations on the treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Medicine is a dynamic science and should be considered accordingly. All readers should evaluate the information for their own purposes.