



BIRD FLU - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: *What is Bird Flu?*

A: Bird flu or Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is a highly contagious poultry disease that is caused by Type A influenza virus. It causes high mortalities in poultry.

Q: *What animals can be affected by bird flu?*

A: Bird flu can affect a wide variety of birds. Domestic poultry such as chickens and turkeys are the most susceptible.

Q: *How is bird flu spread?*

A: The virus can be spread to susceptible birds through:

- Direct contact with nasal and respiratory secretions from infected birds
- Direct contact with the faeces of infected birds
- Contamination of feed and water
- Contact with contaminated equipment and humans

Many species of waterfowl, especially wild geese, ducks and swans, may carry the virus without clinical signs. The virus is concentrated in faeces and nasal and eye discharges. Infection may be introduced by migratory wild birds.

Q: *What are the signs that infected poultry will show?*

A: Infected poultry can show signs such as:

- sudden death
- lack of energy and appetite
- swelling of the head, eyelids, combs, wattles and legs
- purple discolouration of the wattles and combs
- nasal discharge
- coughing and sneezing
- diarrhoea

PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS

Q: *Can bird flu be transmitted from chickens to humans?*

A: It is rare for the bird flu virus to be transmitted from chickens to humans. Of all the bird flu virus strains, only the H5N1, H9N2 and H7N7 strains have been known to pass from chickens to humans.

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Q: How is the disease transmitted to humans?

A: The virus is transmitted to humans through close contact with infected chickens. Transmission occurs through inhalation of droplets of nasal and respiratory secretions from the infected chickens when they cough or sneeze as well as inhalation of dried faecal matter.

Q: What are the symptoms of humans infected with bird flu?

A: The reported symptoms of bird flu in humans have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms such as cough, fever, sore throat and muscle aches to eye infections, pneumonia and other complications

Q: Can bird flu be transmitted from human to human?

A: There is no evidence of human-to-human transmissions.

CONSUMPTION OF POULTRY & POULTRY PRODUCTS

Q: Is it safe to eat poultry and eggs?

A: Yes, the poultry and eggs available in the market are safe to eat. Bird flu is transmitted to humans through close contact with infected live poultry. There is no evidence that bird flu can be spread to humans through the consumption of poultry and eggs.

Q: Is it safe to consume canned poultry products and chicken essence?

A: It is safe to consume canned poultry products and chicken essence. There is no evidence that bird flu can be transmitted to humans through the consumption of poultry and eggs. Moreover, all canned products undergo a heat treatment and pressurised canning process that effectively destroys any viruses.

Q: Is it safe to handle raw poultry?

A: Yes, it is safe to handle raw poultry. Bird flu is transmitted to humans through close contact with infected live poultry. However, you should practice general food safety precautions such as separating raw from cooked food to avoid cross contamination which can cause food poisoning.

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Q: Are there guidelines to cooking poultry?

A: Consumers are advised to cook poultry meat thoroughly. Thorough cooking helps to kill any germs present in food.

Q: Is it safe to consume raw or half-boiled eggs?

A: Consumers are advised to eat food that is well-cooked. Thorough cooking helps to kill any harmful germs present. The eating of any raw or semi-cooked food, including eggs, comes with an inherent food safety risk.

PET POULTRY & OTHER PET BIRDS

Q: I/My neighbour/My school own some pet chickens/birds. Is it safe to continue keeping the birds?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. The risk of pet birds getting infected with bird flu is very low. Hence, owners can continue to keep pet birds.

Pet chickens/birds kept in homes are sourced from local farms, pet shops or are bred by the owners at home. All live birds imported into Singapore are monitored by AVA for infectious diseases including bird flu.

Q: Do I need to take any precautionary measures if I own pet chickens/birds?

A: Bird flu can be spread by wild migratory birds. Owners are advised to take precautionary measures such as keeping their birds in a bird-proof enclosure (e.g. cage, hen house or a netted area in their gardens) so that they do not come into contact with wild birds. Also, owners should not introduce birds of unknown origin to their existing pet birds.

Anyone who handles pet birds should also practice good hygiene, such as washing hands thoroughly with soap after handling their pets.

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Q: Do I need to wear a face mask when I handle my pet birds?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. It is not necessary for you to wear a face mask.

As a general precaution, adopt hygiene practices such as washing hands thoroughly with soap after handling the birds.

Q: What should I do if my pet bird falls sick?

A: Call your veterinarian for advice. If you have more than one bird, separate the healthy birds from the sick birds if possible. The birds could be kept in enclosures (e.g. cage, hen house or a netted area in the garden) that are not adjacent to each other. As a general precaution, adopt hygiene practices such as washing hands thoroughly with soap after handling the birds.

Q: What should I do if I don't want to keep my birds anymore?

A: You can surrender them to AVA's Centre for Animal Welfare and Control for euthanasia. The CAWC's hotline is: 1800-476-1600.

VISITS TO NATURE RESERVES, BIRD PARK, ZOO etc

Q: Bird flu is usually spread by migratory birds. Is it safe to go to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. It is safe to visit Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, as it is highly unlikely that visitors would catch avian flu from wild birds.

Only infected chickens have been known to spread the disease to people who have come in close contact with them. Park visitors would not come in close contact with the wild birds at Sungei Buloh. They view the birds at a distance with their binoculars and telescopes.

In addition, AVA and NParks have an on-going surveillance programme for bird flu in wild birds at Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve. AVA collects blood samples and cloacal swabs from trapped wild birds for testing. To date, no bird flu has been detected.

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Q: Is it safe to visit other parks and reservoirs?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. It is safe to visit parks and reservoirs, as it is highly unlikely that visitors would catch avian flu from wild birds. Only infected chickens have been known to spread the disease to people who have come in close contact with them. Moreover, visitors to reservoirs and parks would not come in close contact with the wild birds.

Q: Is it safe to visit the Bird Park and the Zoo?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. It is safe to visit the Bird Park and Zoo. The Bird Park and Zoo have also taken additional precautions to prevent the introduction of bird flu. They have put in place precautionary measures to protect their birds, staff and visitors, and to prevent visitors from coming into close contact with wild birds.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY AVA

Q: What is AVA doing to prevent the introduction of bird flu into Singapore?

A: AVA has taken the necessary precautionary measures to prevent the incursion of bird flu. We have banned the import of live birds, poultry meat, poultry products and eggs from countries affected by bird flu.

We have also intensified our checks and surveillance on imported poultry and eggs at points of entry. AVA checks every consignment of live poultry for signs of bird flu. Testing of imported poultry and eggs for bird flu have also been stepped up.

In addition, AVA officers have stepped up checks and surveillance on our poultry slaughterhouses and poultry farms. AVA has briefed the operators of slaughterhouses and farms on how to look out for signs of bird flu, and they are required to immediately report to AVA if they suspect bird flu. As an added precaution, local poultry farm operators have been instructed not to allow the public to visit their farms. Farms are also required to ensure that biosecurity measures (e.g. disinfection and bird-proofing) are in place.

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Q: What happens if cases of bird flu are discovered in our poultry farms?

A: AVA has a contingency plan to deal an outbreak of bird flu in Singapore. In the event of an outbreak of bird flu in any of our poultry farms, AVA will take immediate actions to control and eradicate the disease. AVA will cull the poultry in the affected farms and all poultry farms will be placed under strict quarantine.

OTHERS

Q: Can birds such as crows, mynahs and pigeons spread bird flu to humans?

A: Crows, mynahs and pigeons are not known to be involved in the transmission of bird flu to humans. The virus is transmitted to humans through close contact with infected chickens.

Q: Can my pet cat/dog contract bird flu?

A: There is no evidence that bird flu can be transmitted to cats and dogs.

Q: Will I contract bird flu if I remove bird faeces from my car/garden/windows etc? How should I remove them?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. It is unlikely that you will contract bird flu by removing bird faeces. However, you should adopt normal hygiene practices such as avoiding direct contact with the faeces by wearing gloves or using a piece of cloth or tissue. You should also wash your hands thoroughly after removing faecal matter.

NB: The public can call the AVA Hotline at 1800 – 2262250 for clarification or visit our website at <http://www.ava.gov.sg>

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