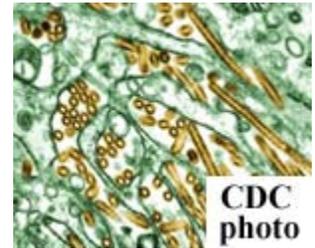


Epidemiology Corner

Avian Flu – some key facts

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks and turkeys, very sick and kill them. Infected birds shed flu virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces. The risk from bird flu is generally low to most people because the viruses occur mainly among birds and do not usually infect humans. However, during an outbreak of bird flu among poultry (domesticated chicken, ducks, turkeys), there is a possible risk to people who have contact with infected birds or surfaces that have been contaminated with excretions from infected birds.

Several cases of human infection with bird flu viruses have occurred since 1997. The first documented human case occurred in Hong Kong in 1997 when the H5N1 strain of avian influenza caused severe respiratory disease in 18 humans, of whom six died – a case fatality rate of 33 percent. So far four countries have documented evidence of laboratory confirmed human cases of H5N1 avian influenza. This includes Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia. The cumulative numbers reported to World Health Organization (WHO) from these countries are 117, of whom 60 died – A case fatality rate of 51 percent. Currently, there is no documented evidence of any human infection in United States. Symptoms of bird flu in humans have ranged from typical flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches) to eye infections, pneumonia, severe respiratory diseases (such as acute respiratory distress) and other severe and life-threatening complications. Studies suggest that the prescription medicines approved for human flu viruses would work in preventing bird flu infection in humans. However, flu viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so these medications may not always work.



There is currently no vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 virus. However, vaccine development efforts are under way. For further information on avian flu visit CDC website www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/