

### ■ Fast Facts About Avian Flu ■

*Current Information as of June 8, 2006*

## Handling and Cooking Poultry

Avian influenza is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses, which occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide, acting as reservoirs, carry a normally harmless form of influenza viruses in their intestines, and wild birds usually do not get sick from them. Unlike most avian influenza viruses, however, a new strain of H5N1 has caused mortality in more than 80 species of wild birds. Avian flu can be very contagious among domestic poultry, and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and kill them.

### **Is there a risk for humans becoming infected with avian influenza by eating poultry?**

There is no evidence that properly cooked poultry can be a source of infection for avian influenza viruses. Furthermore, the likelihood of infected poultry entering the U.S. food supply is extremely low due to import restrictions, extensive avian influenza testing programs, and federal inspection programs.

### **If infected poultry enters the U.S. food supply, how can I protect myself?**

Cooking poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F kills the avian influenza virus as it does other bacteria and viruses. Proper cooking is important if there is a concern that the avian influenza virus might be present. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) advises that cooking poultry to the proper temperature and preventing cross-contamination between raw and cooked food is the key to food safety.

### **What other precautions can I take?**

Consumers are reminded to:

- 1) Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- 2) Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw poultry, meat, and fish and their juices away from other foods.
- 3) After cutting raw meat, wash cutting board, knife, and countertops with hot, soapy water.
- 4) Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water;
- 5) Use a food thermometer to ensure poultry has reached the safe internal temperature of at least 165 degrees F to kill foodborne bacteria that might be present, including the avian influenza virus; and

Washing raw poultry and meat is **not recommended** prior to cooking. Splattered water may spread bacteria.

### **So, is it safe to eat poultry meat and eggs?**

Yes. Scientific experts have confirmed that the avian flu does not pose a food safety risk for consumers. Currently, the risk of humans catching the disease comes from being in close contact with live poultry that have the disease, and not through eating cooked poultry or eggs.

### **What evidence is this based on?**

The U.S. Food Safety Agency has monitored developments since avian flu was first reported in the Far East eight years ago. During that time, most human cases have had close contact with infected birds. The most up-to-date information and evidence is currently being monitored and shared with the public as it becomes available.

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### **How about touching uncooked poultry meat?**

You should always wash your hands after handling raw poultry meat and eggs to avoid contamination from bacteria or viruses. In countries where avian flu is present in poultry, this will also help prevent contamination with the virus.

### **Would cooking poultry and eggs properly kill the virus?**

Cooking food thoroughly will kill bacteria and viruses. Poultry and eggs should always be cooked properly to avoid food poisoning. Even if avian flu were present, current advice on preparing, cooking and eating poultry meat and eggs would still apply.

### **What are the guidelines for cooking and eating poultry and eggs?**

If you're cooking a whole chicken or other bird, check the temperature of the innermost part of the thigh and wing, and the thickest part of the breast. Use a meat thermometer to determine that poultry has been cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F.

People should not eat raw eggs or use raw eggs in dishes that will not be cooked. Eggs should be cooked until the yellows and whites are firm. All egg mixtures should be cooked to 160 degrees F.

### **Is it safe to eat meat and eggs from vaccinated birds?**

The vaccines used to vaccinate birds against avian flu do not pose any health concerns, provided that a licensed vaccine with marketing authorization is used, and the correct interval between vaccination and slaughter or date eggs are laid is observed.

### **What precautions can hunters take to reduce the risk for infection from avian influenza when hunting birds in the United States?**

Hunters should follow routine precautions when handling game, including wild birds. The U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center recommends that hunters:

- 1) do not handle or eat sick game;
- 2) wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game, wash hands with soap and water (or with alcohol-based hand products if the hands are not visibly soiled), and thoroughly clean knives, equipment, and surfaces that come in contact with game;
- 3) do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals;
- 4) disinfect tools, gloves, and materials that come into contact with killed birds;
- 5) place uncooked game in a plastic bag or container with ice for transport; and
- 6) cook all game thoroughly. Cooking to 165 degrees F kills the virus.

Find more information and answers on these Web sites:

K-State Research and Extension: [www.asi.ksu.edu/avianflu](http://www.asi.ksu.edu/avianflu)

U.S. Government: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

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