



# AVIAN BIRD FLU —STAY INFORMED—

## ■ Fast Facts About Avian Flu ■

*Current Information as of June 8, 2006*

### Bird Hunter Safety

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.

**Avian influenza (AI) has not yet been found in any birds in North or South America.** Even so, necessary precautions should be taken to lessen the chance that contact with potentially infected birds in the future would pose a human health risk.

#### **Is there a risk for bird hunters to become infected with avian influenza?**

If the H5N1 strain of avian influenza enters the United States, there will be a risk for hunters to get the disease from birds they harvest. There are no known cases where avian influenza has been passed from wild birds to humans, but direct transmission from wild birds to humans cannot be excluded.

#### **What are the highest risk species of birds?**

One significant possibility is that the H5N1 avian influenza virus will be brought down from breeding grounds near the Arctic Circle by migratory waterfowl and/or shore birds. It will most likely enter in Alaska and follow the Pacific flyway and then spread eastward. Spread of the disease has been observed along migratory pathways in other countries. Ducks are known to pass the virus in their feces. Thus, migratory waterfowl probably constitute the highest risk among wild birds.

#### **Should I be concerned about the virus during the 2006-2007 hunting season?**

Hunters do not need to be overly concerned about avian influenza at this time since it has not been diagnosed in North America. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and other public health agencies are working together to collect samples and test for the occurrence of H5N1 in wild birds in Alaska. At this time, no birds in this program have tested positive for H5N1. Other testing programs for AI in migratory birds are starting in the summer of 2006. Hunters should stay informed and educated about these programs as the fall migration and hunting season begins.

#### **What about pheasant and quail?**

Avian influenza viruses have been known to infect pheasant and quail; however, the effect of the H5N1 virus on these birds is not yet clear. If the infection is similar to other domesticated birds, the birds will weaken quickly after exposure to the virus and it is likely that hunters will not encounter these birds in the field. Producers growing quail and pheasant may obtain more information about how to reduce the chance of infection in farmed birds from a KSU publication called Avian Influenza Prevention in Gamebird and Ratite Facilities (Pub no. MF-2114) from their local extension office.

#### **How is Avian Influenza spread and what are the signs in birds?**

Infected birds shed influenza virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and fecal matter. The virus can spread through birds easily by passing through nasal secretions and fecal matter. Signs of infection in birds include a lack of energy and appetite, nasal discharge and wet areas on the feathers around the nasal area, coughing or rattling and shaking of the head when they sneeze.

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### **How do I protect myself?**

Until H5N1 is reported in the United States, there is little reason to take more than the standard precautionary measures to prevent other disease transmission. For example:

- do not harvest or handle birds that do not act normal and otherwise appear healthy;
- avoid splashing fecal material on face or in eyes or mouth;
- wash hands with soap and water after handling or cleaning birds.

When H5N1 reaches the U.S., the most obvious way for all people to protect themselves is to refrain from coming into close contact with birds. However, if that's not possible or desirable, hunters (in particular) can reduce their risk by not hunting migratory waterfowl until the effects of the virus on humans in the U.S. has been determined. Once the virus is in the country, and assuming that it has been observed to cause little or no problem in those who handle birds routinely, you may want to resume hunting, but take extra care when handling and cleaning the birds

### **How do I handle harvested birds?**

In addition to viruses, birds can carry bacteria or parasites and should thus be handled with standard food safe precautions. The usual procedures for handling wild game are always important to follow. These include:

- All game should be processed and stored at reduced temperatures as soon as possible after harvesting.
- For best protection, wear a protective mask and rubber gloves while handling birds.
- Disinfect all cleaning surfaces before and after use.
- Use disinfectant hand wipes after concluding your hunt.
- Disinfect all boots and clothing before taking them into your vehicle or home.
- Refrain from eating, drinking, or handling tobacco products when handling unclean tools or birds.

Hot, soapy water will kill the virus. Use a solution of 10% chlorine bleach to disinfect surfaces and utensils.

### **How do I protect my retrieving dog?**

H5N1 infection in cats and ferrets has been reported. It is unknown what the risk of transmission of the disease is to dogs. Until more is known, dogs should probably not be used for retrieving downed birds if H5N1 reaches the U.S.

If dogs are used, make certain that they bring only birds you harvested, not birds that they might find dead or sick at the hunting site. Dogs should be kept away from other household members for 5-7 days after the hunt. If dogs become ill, contact your veterinarian and follow their recommendations.

### **Can I eat harvested birds?**

If the birds appeared normal and healthy at the time of harvest, the risk of contracting H5N1 from them is reduced, but is not zero. Cooking birds to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F kills the avian flu virus. However, it is essential that you prevent cross-contamination between raw and cooked foods to prevent disease problems.

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