

Monthly Newsletter

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Learn the Facts About Avian Flu

As if modern life isn't stressful enough, we now are hearing about the possible pandemic of "bird flu." A recent made-for-TV movie didn't help by graphically portraying the chaos that could occur if millions contract this potentially fatal illness. But by learning the facts and avoiding the tendency to panic (remember Y2K?) we can minimize unreasonable fear.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services has developed two official Websites listed below which will provide you and your family with a wealth of information to help sort fact from fiction in understanding this disease.

Wild birds – waterfowl and shore birds, including wild geese, wild ducks, storks, egrets, herons and falcons – are the common carriers of avian flu virus. The virus usually doesn't make these birds sick, but they can spread the virus far and wide in their yearly migrations. All birds are potential hosts to the virus, but the greatest threat is found in chickens, turkeys and domestic ducks. They catch the virus from direct contact with wild birds, from their droppings, or from food or water contaminated by those droppings. The virus "lives" in the birds droppings, saliva or nasal secretions. Domestic birds usually become ill and die when they get infected.

The avian flu stays "alive" for long periods in the birds' excretions and on surfaces contaminated with those excretions. Human to human contact is the great fear because that would lead to rapid dissemination of the virus through the population. *But human-to-human transmission has not happened and indeed, may not ever happen.* However, public health experts in Indonesia are currently investigating a family of six who have all become infected. It remains to be seen if the source of their infections was individual contact with an infected bird or direct human-to-human transmission.

If it does eventually occur, isolation and quarantine would offer the best protection from infection in the absence of an effective vaccine.

Some basic precautions should be practiced because the proper cooking of poultry and eggs totally inactivates the virus. Poultry should be cooked to 165 degrees F (70 C) and eggs should be cooked to the point where they are not runny.

Two HHS websites (www.avianflu.gov) and (www.pandemicflu.gov) will provide you with the very latest information on your particular state's plan for dealing with an outbreak and will acquaint you with sound medical information as well as toll-free numbers to call to report dead birds in your area.