

## Avian Influenza: The Facts

### What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza, also called AI, avian flu or bird flu are viruses that infect all species of birds. Wild birds, particularly ducks and geese, can carry flu viruses without becoming sick. However, they can spread the disease to other birds, including domestic poultry. In rare cases, mammals, including humans, can catch avian flu from infected birds.

Health experts around the world watch avian influenza viruses carefully, in case they undergo a major change that could cause a human pandemic. However, it is important to remember that there is currently no influenza pandemic in the world. For more information on pandemic influenza, please visit [www.gov.mb.ca/pandemic](http://www.gov.mb.ca/pandemic)

### Why is avian influenza a concern?

For most Manitobans, the risk of getting avian influenza is extremely low. However, on rare occasions, avian flu viruses have spread from birds to humans who have come into direct contact with infected birds or their bodily fluids. Some avian influenza viruses are more likely to make humans sick than others.

### How is avian influenza spread to humans?

Although the risk to humans is low, people can become infected with the virus through direct contact with infected birds, their bodily fluids (such as droppings or blood) or contaminated surfaces, including tools. It is also possible to catch the disease by inhaling airborne fluid droplets or drinking contaminated water. Avian influenza viruses are usually not spread from one person to another.

### What should I know about the bird flu found at a Manitoba turkey operation?

The type of avian influenza (H5N2) usually does not cause illness in humans (low pathogenic). The farm operation is quarantined and other operations in the area are being monitored. There is no indication of any human illness, however, as a precaution all workers were contacted and offered preventive antivirals. It is still safe to eat turkey products. Avian influenza is not transmitted to people through the consumption of cooked turkey meat. Proper preparation and cooking of all meat is always advised to reduce any concerns regarding all food borne illness.

### How can I protect myself and my family?

It is important to remember that the risk of avian flu is extremely low; and that the risk of health effects from human influenza is far greater. The best way to protect yourself and others from any flu is to:

- Get a flu shot.
- Cover your cough.
- Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- Stay home if you are sick.

### **Is it safe to eat poultry or eggs?**

To date there has been no evidence that eating properly cooked poultry or eggs could transmit avian influenza to humans. However, consuming raw or undercooked poultry or eggs may pose a small risk to humans. Viruses, (including the flu virus) are easily killed by heat, so it is important to thoroughly cook all poultry and eggs. This means cooking whole birds to an internal temperature of 82 degrees Celsius (180 degrees Fahrenheit), cooking poultry pieces to an internal temperature of 77 degrees Celsius (170 degrees Fahrenheit), and using pasteurized eggs or cooking eggs until the yolk is no longer runny. Please refer to the Government of Manitoba fact sheet *Food Safety and Avian Influenza Precautions* for further details on safe food handling practices.

### **Is it safe to drink water?**

Generally, treated drinking water is safe to drink. However, untreated open water bodies such as reservoirs, ponds, lakes, and rivers, where waterfowl gather, have the greatest potential for contamination with the virus. If drinking from one of these untreated sources, it is very important to boil the water prior to consumption.

### **Is hunting safe?**

Hunters who harvest game for food can continue to hunt and cook wild game safely. The risk of catching avian flu from wild birds is low, particularly when following these safety precautions:

- Do not handle or eat birds that appear sick or are found dead.
- Wear disposable rubber or latex gloves when handling live or dead birds.
- Avoid direct contact with blood, feces and the respiratory fluids of wild birds.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling live or dead birds.
- Wash gloves, hands and clothing with soap and warm water immediately after cleaning game.
- After cleaning game, thoroughly clean surfaces and equipment with hot soapy water and then sanitize the area using a household disinfectant.
- Dispose of bird remains in a way that prevents scavenging, such as burial.
- Thoroughly cook any bird you intend to eat. The internal temperature of the cooked game should be 82 degrees Celsius (180 degrees Fahrenheit) with no visible pinkness.
- If you become ill while handling birds, or afterwards, see your doctor and inform him or her that you have been in contact with wild birds.

### **For more information, please visit:**

Manitoba Health

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/index.html>

Public Health Agency of Canada

[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/avian\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/avian_e.html)

Canadian Food Inspection Agency

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/avflu/avflue.shtml>

Manitoba Agriculture, Food, and Rural Initiatives

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/>