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# Advocating for Change: Raising Awareness for Avian Influenza

**HOW TO**  
Drawing Attention to Avian Influenza through Advocacy

**HOW DOES WHY**  
**ADVOCACY WORK?**

**WHO GET STARTED**

# Advocating for Change: Raising Awareness for Avian Influenza

# Drawing Attention to Avian Influenza through Advocacy

**ATTENTION**  
**D R A W I N G**  
**ATTENTION**

In every society, there are individuals, communities and organizations that through their actions, both small and large, have made a positive difference in the lives of people. This is the essence of advocacy. Chances are high that you have already been an advocate for an issue important to you.

Advocacy is the effort to change public perception and influence policy decisions and funding priorities. Advocates raise awareness about issues and propose specific solutions among different publics, including policy-makers, experts, the media, and affected communities. Advocacy involves making a case in favor of a particular issue, using skillful persuasion and strategic action. Simply put, advocacy means actively supporting a cause and trying to get others to support it as well.

Advocacy has been an important strategy to improve public health throughout the world. It has been used to call attention to and promote improvements in services in health facilities, schools, and refugee camps. It also has been used to protect the health and well-being of large populations, such as international advocacy efforts in support of routine immunization, regular cervical screening for women, and safety and protective gear for workers in high-risk occupations.

## The Purpose of this Guide

This Guide provides an overview of the advocacy process and its components – from planning and information gathering, to evaluating the success of your advocacy efforts – and suggests strategic activities and messages that can be used to reach different audiences. It can be used regardless of the issue, the size of your organization, or the resources you have.

It is important to note that this Guide provides an overview and suggests recommended steps to develop an advocacy strategy. Consideration should be given to the specific social, cultural, and political context in a community and/or country so advocacy plans and activities are adapted to the circumstances in which they will be used.

## **Why Is It Important to Raise Awareness on Avian Influenza (AI)?**

H5N1 or Avian Influenza is a critical public health threat that also has the potential to affect people's well-being and their livelihoods. For those who have no experience with avian influenza outbreaks, the threat to the community may be considered exaggerated. For those communities that have experienced an outbreak, news stories may fuel fears for the safety of the community and misconceptions about what could happen. In both scenarios, advocacy can play an important role. Advocacy at the community and local level can help educate leaders and other influential people to take steps to prevent and control the virus, and by doing so, their family and other citizens.

## **Who Can Raise Support for Avian Influenza Prevention and Control?**

Anyone who cares about the health and well-being of their community – health care providers, women's groups, parents, workers, members of religious groups, and NGOs – can be an advocate for avian influenza prevention and control. The only requirement is to be actively committed to the issue. Many people may think they do not have the skills and training to get involved in advocacy. This is not true: many people from communities are the best spokespeople for their issues and concerns.

## **How Does Advocacy Work?**

Advocacy focuses efforts on influential people who have the power to change policies and public opinion, as well as on publics who, in turn, can influence decision-makers. Policy-makers include national, regional or local government officials, traditional leaders, school officials, religious figures, businesses or members of a funding organization. Given their positions, they are able to make decisions that affect their communities. Their involvement and support is critical to success.

Because public opinion affects political decisions, advocacy also needs to address specific and general publics who can mobilize to influence decision-makers. A public education campaign can address a whole community or a specific group, such as parents of young children. The point to remember here is that the audience for advocacy is the person or group of people whose actions can improve the situation related to avian influenza. This can range from local health officials, to village elders, to networks of animal health workers or paraveterinarians.

# How to Get Started

While specific advocacy techniques and tools vary, the following elements form the basic building blocks for effective advocacy.

## Identify the Specific Advocacy Issue and Potential Solutions

The process begins by identifying issues or needs that require action. It is important that your advocacy effort be based on credible information about the problem and possible solutions. Correct information can be gathered in several ways, such as:

- Participating in public meetings
- Viewing Credible websites
- Reading the newspaper, hearing speeches, or listening to radio and television
- Meeting one-on-one with decision makers

Using this information, focus on educating community leaders, groups and others about the possible consequences of avian influenza and promoting preventive activities to protect the community from potential illness and economic loss.

If an outbreak occurs in your country or community, advocacy activities can help insist that proper measures are in place to help control the spread of the virus. As with many public health situations, it is easier to get attention for your issue if you are responding to a critical situation (e.g., if an outbreak occurs) than it is to promote prevention activities. But they are equally important in controlling avian influenza.

**HOW TO  
GET STARTED**  
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<b>Advocacy Issue</b>	<b>Advocacy Solution</b>	<b>Examples of Advocacy Activities</b>
AI can be spread by local farming practices	Changing poultry-rearing practices to require biosecurity measures such as not allowing vehicles or equipment from other farms onto a farmyard without first decontaminating tires, cages, equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with farmers' organizations or collectives to promote the new biosecurity practices perhaps through community meetings or trainings.</li> </ul>
Blood from animals can spread the AI virus	Changing practices at food establishments and animal markets to minimize bloodshed and to ensure that food is properly prepared and cooked to avoid contact with blood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking to local restaurants and food vendors to adopt good hygiene practices during food preparation, and proper cooking methods for poultry.</li> <li>• Writing letters to the local business or vendors association, urging them to educate and encourage their members on safe poultry preparation.</li> </ul>
Good surveillance and outbreak reporting to preventing and controlling AI outbreaks	Introducing and enforcing laws and systems to promote surveillance and reporting of avian influenza outbreaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging the provision of training for local agriculture or animal health workers on proper outbreak investigation, prevention and control, and local rules and regulations related to avian influenza.</li> <li>• Talking to veterinary and human health workers to ensure that possible AI symptoms are urgently and properly analyzed.</li> <li>• Educating community leaders to be alert to the sudden death of large numbers of birds and other avian flu symptoms, and giving them information on how to properly report these die-offs or illnesses.</li> </ul>

Advocacy Issue	Advocacy Solution	Examples of Advocacy Activities
<p>AI can be spread by contact with an infected animal – and can affect anyone – so it is important to educate all community members</p>	<p>Encouraging government ministries, professional organizations and other groups to provide resources to educate community members about the transmission of AI and how to prevent it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with government or professional/private organizations to develop and distribute posters, booklets, or other materials to educate the general public on how AI is transmitted and how it can be prevented.</li> </ul>
<p>Personal protective equipment can protect health workers from exposure to the AI virus</p>	<p>Urging for the mandatory provision and proper use of protective equipment to high-risk populations such as animal health workers involved in culling operations, or human health workers employed at clinics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging local animal health organizations, ministries of health, or clinics to hold training workshops on how to use personal protective equipment to protect against avian influenza.</li> </ul>
<p>Live bird markets can increase the spread of AI among birds</p>	<p>Introducing and enforcing laws or policies that require vendors to cage birds separately at all times, avoiding the slaughtering of birds at the market, keeping vehicles and other equipment that transport birds from their farms a certain distance away from the market, and thoroughly disinfecting their stalls after packing up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging enforcement of (and obeying new laws) on market closures or other restrictions by writing letters to the local newspaper in support of these measures.</li> </ul>

## 2 Select Advocacy Audiences

Advocacy efforts must be directed to the people who make decisions who can affect laws and regulations or their enforcement (primary audiences). Often these people are reached by those who influence them such as staff, advisors, influential elders, the media and the public (secondary audiences).

## 3 Gather Information on What Your Advocacy Audience Thinks

Once you have identified your primary and secondary audiences you need to understand their opinions, attitudes and beliefs about your advocacy issue. Often, there is existing information – such as research studies, media reports, or surveys – that can help you to understand these audiences. Sometimes, you may have informal information gathered from talking with other advocates and colleagues or by reading speeches or other documents written by the organization or individuals.

**Know Your Audience.** If you are encouraging local restaurants and food vendors to avoid cooking and slaughtering methods that might increase the risk of avian influenza transmission, you might want to first start with talking to local restaurant owners or vendors in your community to see if they are aware of proper cooking temperatures or safe slaughtering practices. Also, more broadly to assess what they know about AI, perceptions, etc not only knowing what they know about safe practices. If they do not know how to safely slaughter and prepare chickens, then your initial task would be to provide basic information on how to avoid excessive bloodshed and observe good hygienic (and disinfection) practices in food preparation. You could support your educational messages with information from the international restaurant owners association, encouraging the safe preparation of poultry to keep customers and restaurant workers safe.

The table below illustrates a few primary audiences and the secondary audiences that might influence them.

Primary Audience (Targets)	Secondary Audience (Influencers)
Community Health Facility Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health professionals groups or unions</li> <li>• Consumers/Users of the facility</li> <li>• Local media</li> <li>• Local NGOs</li> <li>• Local civil society groups (e.g. women s unions)</li> </ul>
Village Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious leaders</li> <li>• Elders groups</li> <li>• Schoolteachers</li> <li>• Family members of Council members</li> <li>• Community business owners/merchants</li> <li>• Local media</li> </ul>
Minister of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister</li> <li>• Minister of Finance</li> <li>• Health professionals groups or unions</li> <li>• National newspapers/other media</li> <li>• National and international public</li> <li>• health-based NGOs</li> </ul>
Head of National Avian Influenza Task Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of relevant ministries (health, agriculture, animal health, information/communication)</li> <li>• Women s unions</li> <li>• National and international NGOs</li> <li>• International donors</li> <li>• National print and broadcast media</li> <li>• Poultry businesses</li> <li>• Pharmaceutical firms</li> </ul>



## 4 Develop Advocacy Messages to Frame Your Actions

Messages state what you want to happen and what will motivate audiences to engage in desired behaviors. Different audiences respond to different messages. For example, a politician may become motivated when he/she knows how many people in his/her district care about the issue of avian influenza outbreaks. A Minister of Health may take action when he/she is presented with detailed research on the extent of the problem (for example, the number of health facilities that are not aware of health and hygiene precautions to protect against avian influenza) and the feasibility of the solution (for example, providing information or training to the health facilities on how to detect, prevent and control avian flu).

Effective advocacy messages need to state the case in terms that will motivate decision-makers to respond and act. For example “Simple protective measures in our community can protect our merchants from losing their business and revenues.”

When developing messages, you should consider the following questions:

- Is the message clearly understood? Is it in a language appropriate for the target audience?
- Does the message respect cultural and social norms? Is the message perceived as truthful?
- Does the audience feel that the message is addressing them?
- Is the message able to convince the target audiences to take action? How will your action benefit the target audience? Alternatively, will supporting your advocacy action create any negative response?
- Is your message based on sound scientific data or other valid evidence?

Given the data, is your message or what you want to achieve realistic? Oftentimes, good data itself can make for the most persuasive message, especially if the source is one that the decision maker already trusts and consults with.

- Does the message clearly state why the intended audience will be motivated to take action?

## 5 Select Advocacy Tactics and Tools

Advocacy tactics and tools are the way you present your advocacy messages to your audiences. The tactics you select will depend on the target audiences you are trying to reach as well as their availability and interest in your issue. A senior decision maker in a ministry or large organization may grant you only one short meeting to discuss your issue, for example.

To be successful, you need to present a careful and convincing case that is based on correct data and not unsubstantiated rumors. The presentation of the argument may take many forms, including briefing documents, presentations, fact sheets with new data, editorials in newspapers, or radio discussion programs.

For example, if you are a parent approaching your child's school to encourage the inclusion of avian influenza-related information into a lesson plan it might be helpful to have examples of curricula or other lesson plans that have been used by others to educate students on the risks of avian influenza. You might also have some ideas in mind for a poem, essay, drawing or poster design competition to be held at the school based on some of the core avian flu prevention and control messages.

Some tactics that have already been used to prevent and control avian influenza include:

- CEDAC (Centre d'Etude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien) organized a one-day presentation for commune council members and village chiefs from 60 communes (approximately 600 villages) in Cambodia to advocate for the importance of avian influenza preventive measures that could be undertaken by farmers, businesses and the general public.
- The Lao Women's Union held a half-day meeting for representatives from the government ministries of health, agriculture and forestry, and wildlife and fisheries to jumpstart community mobilization activities on avian influenza preparedness and biosecurity in Laos. These efforts have, in effect, created champions for AI preparedness from within the government, which lends credibility, resources and power to the advocacy effort.

## **6 Develop Partnerships to Gain Support for your Action**

Involving large numbers of people representing diverse interests can sometimes provide safety for advocacy as well as build support. These alliances can be short term and strategic or long term and ongoing, requiring varying levels of support. For example, a poultry association can work with a group of community backyard farmers to educate their counterparts in neighboring communities about the importance of fencing their poultry and quarantining newly acquired chickens and ducks.

Initiating partnerships and nurturing a diverse collection of interests can take time and effort, but it allows different groups to capitalize on each other's strengths. By their very existence, diverse partnerships communicate

to policy makers, opinion leaders, and the public at large that an issue is so important that a wide range of interests – who may otherwise have little in common – have come together to promote change. Partnerships also allow smaller organizations to pool their resources and take on projects and initiatives that are too large for small individual groups to address.

## **7 Mobilize Resources**

Sustaining an effective advocacy effort over a short or long period of time requires time of staff, funds and other resources. Resources include more than just money. Human resources are often as important as financial resources.

Budgets should include real costs to get the work done, such as:

- Office space, equipment, supplies, phone costs, fax, postage
- Salaries for staff and/or consultant time
- Costs for programs and events (conferences, briefings, lunches)
- Printing and distribution of documents
- Transport for activities

If you are working with a number of partner organizations, you can share the costs for these activities among the partners. One group may be able to provide meeting space, while another can transport people to meetings.

Having limited resources should not discourage organizations or individuals from becoming advocates. There are many advocacy activities that can be undertaken with a minimum of resources, such as writing letters to policy

makers or the media. Moreover, through partnerships, you may be able to pool limited resources and create enough to support your activities.

## 8 Monitor and Evaluate

Constant feedback on and evaluation of your advocacy activities is the best way to ensure success. If one tactic does not work, then try another, and another, until you reach your goal. Adaptability, creativity and persistence are characteristics of successful advocates.

There are two forms of evaluation to consider:

- Process evaluation, which looks at how the advocacy activities were carried out, (such as which activities occurred, how many times, and where). They focus more on the process of undertaking the activities rather than their outcome.
- Outcome evaluation, which measures how successful you are in meeting your objectives.

Monitoring and evaluation can help you take a step back and assess your progress toward your advocacy objective. Ideally you should assess your efforts once or twice a year and make adjustments based on the results.



# Bringing It All Together: A Step-by-Step Process for Moving from Planning to Action

STEP BY STEP

BRINGING IT

ALL TOGETHER

TOGETHER STEP BY STEP

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

A successful advocacy campaign addresses three distinct groups that influence one another:

- Opinion leaders
- The public; and
- The media.

Opinion leaders will be more likely to support AI efforts when they believe the public agrees with their position. The media educates the public about the need for the proposed policy exchange. An educated public is more likely to express their support for the advocacy campaign's goals to the community and national opinion leaders.

## Advocacy and Opinion Leaders

Advocacy takes place any time opinions are shared, but the most effective advocacy campaigns determine which policy makers or opinion leaders should be convinced to support the issue and offers exactly what they should do to show their support.

Many of the basic tactics for approaching and persuading opinion leaders are the same whether they are at the community, regional or national level. Some of the most effective approaches include:

**1 Targeting efforts.** Assess whose support and agreement among opinion leaders and decision-makers is necessary for the advocacy effort to reach its goals. Decide whom to approach and in what order. Start with the very supportive and move on to those who are somewhat supportive or undecided. One successful technique is to identify a “champion” for your issue who will visibly support your views.

**2 Being prepared.** Try to determine the opinion leader's position in advance on the issue. Look at comments s/he has made about the subject, the kind of

events the leader attends, his/her political affiliation and past policy decisions. This knowledge will help you design a persuasive approach.

**3 Being focused.** Talk only about one subject in the visit or letter. Do not overload the audience with too much information. State the problem and give the solution and describe how this policy maker can support the effort. Make a specific request such as signing a letter, making a public endorsement, or changing a policy. Ask directly and attempt to get a direct answer.

Know who else supports the issue and who disagrees with the issue. This may provide additional reason for the opinion leader to support the issue. When possible, bring community members who support your issue to the meeting.

Following up. Find out if the opinion leader did what he or she committed to doing. Send a letter of thanks for the conversation and restate the position. Thank the leader for any supportive action. If no action has occurred, politely encourage the leader to follow up.

## Educating the Public

Public education helps an advocacy campaign build a broad foundation of support. Effective public education provides people with information about AI and shows them how proposed policy change can protect the community. It also suggests how the public can help and shows them how to be involved. The goal of public education is to inform and mobilize the public.

Public education is most effective when specific audiences are targeted with tailored messages and information. Advocacy efforts may decide to target parents, members of a religious group, merchants in poultry markets or elders. If you are advocating for changes in school policy, your public

education efforts will target parents because their opinions may influence school officials.

As each audience is identified, gather information and create messages that will likely persuade that group. Separate materials should be created for each group. Parents will require different information from business leaders or workers. The type of audience will also determine the tactics used to reach them.

Other activities to educate the public:

- Hold a community event to provide information about AI and encourage people to support the solution.
- Ask permission to distribute material and talk about your issue at meetings that are already planned.
- Give presentations at local meetings, parent teacher associations, traditional councils, training workshops, neighborhood associations and other community gatherings.
- Ask opinion leaders to talk to their friends, family and community about the issue. If these opinion leaders are difficult to reach, write letters and enclose material for them to read.
- Go where the audience is, such as markets, bus stops, agricultural association meetings, community centers and public areas. Distribute flyers and simply talk to people about the advocacy campaign.
- Conduct polls or surveys to gauge community support.
- Write articles about the advocacy effort for newsletters or local newspapers.

For example, an effort to reach out to people in a certain part of the community might involve planning an event in the local community health center. To reach business people, advocates may want to create and distribute a short, factual pamphlet.

Understanding your audience will help you select the most appropriate tactics to use. Following are some brief examples of target audiences, types of messages, and tactics/tools.

Target Audience	Messages	Tactics and Tools
Decision Makers	<p>Messages to decision makers should be short, concise and persuasive. Even if the decision maker is not a politician, it can be beneficial to communicate how your proposal enhances his or her political or social standing. Economic arguments such as potential budgetary savings or benefits are always good to include when possible. Policy makers will also want to know what action you would like them to take and who else supports your proposal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal or informal face-to-face meetings</li> <li>• Informal conversation at social, religious, political or business gathering</li> <li>• Letters: personal, organizational or coalition</li> <li>• Briefing meetings</li> <li>• Program site visits</li> <li>• Fact sheet</li> <li>• Newspaper article, editorial</li> <li>• Peer advocacy — having them talk with an influential they respect and trust about the issue</li> </ul>
Advocacy Organizations	<p>Advocacy organizations need specific information that supports their arguments. Research and data are useful when facts and figures are presented clearly. Because advocates often insert such facts directly into their material targeted to decision makers, design the content for a policy audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with advocacy organization s leaders and staff</li> <li>• Ready-to-use fact sheets</li> <li>• Graphics or illustrations</li> <li>• Factual data and anecdotal from their community and members</li> <li>• Briefing meeting for advocacy organizations.</li> <li>• Electronically available information/useful websites</li> </ul>
Broadcast and Print Media Journalists	<p>The media are generally interested in new, groundbreaking information or how an issue relates to a current event. The press generally likes to know how a situation affects individuals, often reporting human interest stories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News release</li> <li>• Press conference or media event</li> <li>• Issue briefing for journalists</li> <li>• Graphics or illustrations</li> <li>• Fact sheets or background sheet</li> <li>• Media packet or press kit</li> <li>• Data and access to experts</li> </ul>

## Working with the Media

Engaging the media is important in public education. The media serves two roles: First, it can be a credible source of information that reaches large numbers of people including your primary and secondary audiences, and second, it can take a position or “advocate” for change on its editorial or opinion pages.

There are several ways to engage the media to help convey your messages.

- Build relationships with journalists and meet their needs for timely information. Undertake briefings on emerging issues not only with working journalists but also editors and other media managers. Often journalists do not have the time or resources to research topics. Make sure to have spokesperson from a few organizations or the community available to talk to journalists.
- Approach journalists with news, not a story you want them to cover. News implies new, different, or controversial. Make sure you have something to offer for a story such as a new report or access to an avian influenza expert or an example of an innovative program to address AI.
- Organize field visits to programs and communities. This gives the story a human face and ensures that the real issues are kept in the forefront of attention.
- Work internally to ensure that any person who may interact with the media is equipped to handle any questions that may come their way. It is particularly helpful to have a variety of spokespersons available that can work with the media, as this provides diversity to the voices of people.

- Identify one or two key messages for your spokesperson and add to this any additional background information on the issue and recent events that may be touched upon by the media.
- Develop materials that support your issue. Fact sheets, briefing kits, reports, charts and graphs offer the media useful information to finish a story. Make sure these materials reinforce the key messages and provide the technical content for these messages.

In the area of avian influenza, training workshops for journalists has been used to educate and advocate for avian influenza-related issues. These training workshops usually invite a broad spectrum of news professionals from television, radio and print media and educate them on the importance of prevention and control measures for avian influenza. Some of these workshops include field visits to affected communities and farms to observe the constraints faced by people who are most at risk for AI, and to gather information for future pieces.

**In Laos**, AED and the Lao Journalists Association held two workshops for print and broadcast media (in cooperation with the Lao agriculture and health ministries) to provide information on avian influenza risk behaviors, practice preventive measures and the Lao national strategic plan on AI. Following the second workshop, some of the journalist-attendees produced a 60-second TV spot (the first-ever Lao-produced animated spot), a TV documentary, and two, 30-minute radio programs.

Advocates often view the media as a channel through which to deliver their messages. However, the media can also serve as an effective advocate on its own. Investigative, “watchdog” types of articles or editorials can advocate for decisions to be made and activities to move forward if they are at a stand-still. For example, a feature story on the impact of a culling operation might point out that the government has not devised a plan for compensating farmers for their losses, and highlight the hardships placed on these farmers. This external pressure might in turn serve as a catalyst for the government to consider a compensation policy.

## Conclusions – Using Your Voice

The best way to learn advocacy is by doing. We hope that the processes outlined in this Guide have provided you with some ideas for taking action to prevent and control avian influenza in your community, country, or region. At the very least, you should be able to start the process of identifying specific and realistic activities you would like to accomplish, and determining what types of resources (financial, partner organizations) are available to help you achieve your goals.





# Avian Influenza: Information You Can Use In Your Advocacy Efforts

## INFORMATION AVIAN INFLUENZA: INFORMATION

### Avian Influenza in Birds

#### What is Avian Influenza?

The disease commonly referred to as “bird flu” is an animal infection caused by the H5N1 virus. The virus occurs naturally among birds. Wild birds carry the virus in their intestines, but usually they do not get sick. But some domesticated birds – like chickens, turkeys and ducks – get very sick and can die from the virus.

#### Which birds carry the virus?

Avian influenza can kill domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys. Traditionally, wild waterfowl and shorebirds have been credited as the sources for the many strains of avian influenza, but rarely fell ill. The current H5N1 strain has caused mortality in 40 species of wild birds, including geese, storks, egrets, herons, and falcons, and some mammals.

#### How does it spread?

The virus can remain viable in droppings for long periods, spreading among birds and animals through ingestion or inhalation of the droppings. Virus can also be excreted from the eyes, nose and mouth of infected birds. Transmission from flock to flock is usually by humans – avian influenza viruses can be spread by manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, and people whose clothing or shoes have come in contact with the virus.

#### What are the control measures in birds?

The most common practice to contain the spread of the virus is culling of all infected or exposed birds, proper disposal of carcasses and the quarantining and rigorous disinfection of farms and poultry markets. Vaccination has also

been used but is impractical outside commercial settings and the vaccine requires regular updating. The virus is killed by heat (56 degrees C for 3 hours or 60 degrees C for 30 minutes) and common disinfectants, such as formalin and iodine compounds. Thorough cooking of any poultry meat will destroy the virus, however, if poultry appears sick or is dead do not prepare it for cooking or consumption. Dispose of the poultry properly.

### How could avian influenza reach a country?

Despite any country's controls, avian influenza could be introduced to poultry through the migration of wild birds, the importation of dead chickens, the illegal importation of live birds or the entry of an infected person.

### What should I do if I think my flock is infected with avian influenza?

Call the relevant authorities immediately. Because the signs of avian influenza are so variable, it is important to get the help of an expert for diagnosis. Keep children and pregnant women away from the birds. If you are instructed to handle or dispose of a dead or infected bird, you should wear protective equipment and clothes (including gloves) and place the dead birds into a bag. Dead birds should not be disposed of in a river or a pond, or left in the yard. Protective clothing or equipment should be kept away from other people and thoroughly disinfected after use.

## Avian Influenza in People

### Are people at risk for avian influenza?

To date, most human cases have been limited to people who have had contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. Many of these human cases have occurred in rural or suburban areas where households keep small poultry flocks.

### What can people do to reduce the risk of getting avian influenza?

There are several key behaviors people who come in close contact with poultry can adopt to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. These include protecting their healthy flocks from the introduction of new poultry by quarantining new poultry for 14 days; separating ducks from chickens; keeping poultry in a closed building, cleaning up yards and coops daily to remove droppings; washing their hands with soap before and after handling birds; and cleaning off their shoes before entering their homes.



Here is a fact sheet developed for Laos

If possible, children and pregnant women should be kept away from poultry and poultry parts, and should not handle eggs.

If poultry appears sick, people should not touch it or handle it, but rather call the local authorities. (Keep in mind that ducks often do not show symptoms of the virus.) If people must handle a dead bird, they should wear protective equipment and clothes (including gloves) and place the dead birds into a bag. Dead birds should not be disposed of in a river or a pond, or left in the yard.

### **Why is there so much concern about this virus?**

Although the current outbreaks have been happening since mid-2003, beginning in Asia and spreading around the world, this is the first time that so many countries been affected at the same time by this virus. The animal and human health experts' concern is that the virus is crossing the species barrier and is infecting humans. Scientists are closely monitoring the virus to see if it will mutate, making it easier to spread from human to human.

### **What is the difference between regular, seasonal flu and avian influenza?**

These are different viruses. Avian influenza is transmitted from birds to birds and from birds to humans, but at this point, it is not effectively spread from human to human. That is one of the reasons it is being watched so carefully to see if the virus changes – or mutates – and can be transmitted from human to human. Unlike normal seasonal influenza, where infection causes mild respiratory symptoms in most people, H5N1 has been found

to cause more severe symptoms and leads to faster deterioration in condition. In the present outbreak, many of those infected with the virus have died, and many cases have occurred in previously healthy children and young adults.

### **Can we treat avian influenza?**

There is some evidence that recent H5N1 viruses are susceptible to a class of antiviral drugs called neuraminidase inhibitors – oseltamivir (also known as Tamiflu) and zanamivir (also known as Relenza). H5N1 appears to be resistant to the alternative M2 inhibitors – amantadine and rimantadine. Most experts agree that neuraminidase inhibitors will be helpful in controlling a future pandemic. However, flu viruses can become resistant to drugs.

### **Is there an avian influenza vaccine for people?**

Not yet. There are several potential vaccines for protecting humans from infection with bird flu at various stages of testing. Whether they would be suitable for use against a new pandemic flu strain depends on how much that strain may have mutated from the original H5N1 virus strain. In addition, due to production issues, it is not likely that an effective vaccine would be widely available until several months after the start of a pandemic.

### **Will a regular flu shot protect against avian influenza?**

No. The annual flu vaccination will not provide protection against avian influenza. Current vaccines protect only against circulating human strains.

## **What are the symptoms of avian influenza in people?**

The symptoms are similar to those of other forms of influenza, including fever, sore throat, cough, headache and muscle aches and pains. These symptoms may vary in severity.

## **What should I do if I think I have avian influenza?**

Keep in mind that people get respiratory infections quite regularly, and that the chances that your symptoms are from avian influenza are extremely low. If you live in (or have recently visited) an area where avian influenza in humans has been reported and you are experiencing any of the symptoms listed above, you should seek medical advice and tell your health care provider of your recent travel and activities, including any visits to farms or markets in outbreak areas.

## **I'm traveling to a region where avian influenza has been reported. What should I do to protect myself from the virus?**

Although the risk of infection to travelers to areas affected by avian influenza is currently considered low, people can reduce their risk of infection by avoiding situations where they may have contact with farms and live bird markets, and by ensuring that all uncooked poultry and eggs are handled hygienically with careful attention to hand washing after handling. Proper cooking destroys the virus in poultry and eggs. You can also discuss the risk of avian influenza with your health care provider as part of your routine pre-travel health checks.

Travelers who stay in an avian-influenza affected area for extended periods should consider, as a precautionary measure, having access to influenza antiviral medicine for treatment. This is because long-term residents are at greater risk of exposure to avian influenza over time and, in the event of a more widespread outbreak amongst humans, there may be difficulties encountered in accessing appropriate medicines. Medical advice should be sought before antiviral medicines are used, however.

## **Is it safe to buy and eat chicken?**

Yes. In countries where avian influenza has been reported, healthy poultry and poultry products should be properly cooked and handled during food preparation. Normal temperatures used for cooking (70 degrees C for at least 30 minutes) will kill the virus. People need to be sure that all parts of the poultry are fully cooked (no “pink” parts) and that eggs are also properly cooked (no “runny” yolks). Do not eat birds that have recently been sick and died.

## **Pandemic Risk**

### **What are the chances that the H5N1 avian influenza virus could cause a human pandemic?**

It is possible but not likely. There are several critical steps that must occur before a human pandemic can happen. These include: a new influenza virus subtype emerges; it infects humans, causing serious illness; and it spreads easily and sustainably among humans. The H5N1 virus has met

the first two criteria, but it has not yet efficiently and sustainably infected humans. The risk that the H5N1 virus will acquire this ability remains as long as there are opportunities for human infection; however, control measures that are being undertaken worldwide continue to reduce these risks.

### **Can a pandemic be averted?**

Yes. That is why so much attention by governments and the health professionals is being placed on how to prevent and control the virus. The first priority is to reduce opportunities for human exposure to infected or potentially-infected poultry. Computer modeling has suggested that a human pandemic could be stopped or slowed with actions such as washing hands with soap and water before and after handling poultry, separating ducks and chickens, keeping poultry fenced or penned in, and keeping new poultry separated from existing flocks for 14 days.





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