

Avian Flu Frequently Asked Questions

Reports Of Dead Birds

If you find any single dead birds (or less than 10), including garden birds then you do not need to call the **Defra Helpline (08459 33 55 77)**. You should:

- leave it alone, or
- follow the guidelines below for disposal

Wild birds can carry several diseases that are infectious to people and some simple hygiene precautions should minimise the risk of infection. It is hard for people to catch avian influenza from birds and the following simple steps are also effective against avian influenza.

If you have to move a dead bird:

1. **Avoid touching the bird** with your bare hands
2. If possible, wear disposable protective gloves when picking up and handling (if disposable gloves are not available see 7)
3. Place the dead bird in a suitable plastic bag preferably leak proof. Care should be taken not to contaminate the outside of the bag
4. Tie the bag and place it in a second plastic bag
5. Remove gloves by turning them inside out and then place them in the second plastic bag. Tie the bag and dispose of in the normal household refuse bin.
6. Hands should then be washed thoroughly with soap and water
7. If disposable gloves are not available, a plastic bag can be used as a make-shift glove. When the dead bird has been picked up, the bag can be turned back on itself and tied. It should then be placed in a second plastic bag, tied and disposed of in the normal household waste
8. Alternatively, the dead bird can be buried, but not in a plastic bag
9. Any clothing that has been in contact with the dead bird should be washed using ordinary washing detergent at the temperature normally used for washing the clothing.
10. Any contaminated indoor surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned with normal household cleaner.

Garden bird deaths

Defra are currently seeing an increase in garden bird and particularly finch deaths. The most affected species are greenfinch and chaffinch. The majority of current deaths are being caused by a protozoal organism *Trichomonas*. This is not a disease which humans can catch and it is unrelated to Avian Influenza.

The Defra guidance also advises that not all birds reported to the Defra helpline will be collected for testing. Where bird carcasses aren't collected it will be the responsibility of the owner/manager of the land to arrange for disposal of the carcasses.

There is no legal obligation on the part of local authorities to collect dead birds on private land. However, cases will be considered on an individual basis particularly where significant numbers of aquatic species are concerned or where there is a perceived risk to human health.

Where birds are found on council maintained properties and highways, and are not collected by the SVS for the purposes of testing, then local authorities will arrange to remove the carcasses.

In consideration of the information above, then appropriate health and safety measures should be taken. The Defra website advises the public that if dead birds are handled, it is important to wash your hands with soap and water as quickly as possible. Consideration should also be given to the use of disposable gloves. You should avoid touching you face and certainly do not eat until your hands have been washed. Any soiled clothing must be cleaned with soap and water.

Pet birds kept in your home

Your pet bird should not catch avian influenza if you do not allow it to come into contact with wild birds, wild bird faeces or another introduced infected pet bird.

- Avoid contact between your pet birds and wild birds
- Do not allow contact with wild bird faeces.
- Remember not to introduce wild bird faeces from outside on your clothes or shoes by instituting sensible hygiene measures
- Ensure that any introduced bird comes from a reputable source
- If your bird becomes ill contact your veterinary surgeon for advice.

Who is required to register as a poultry keeper?

By law* in England and Wales you must register if you own or are responsible for a poultry premises with 50 or more birds. This requirement also applies even if the premises is only stocked with 50 or more birds for part of the year. At present, premises with fewer than 50 birds are not required to register, but we encourage keepers to do so voluntarily.

This does not necessarily mean 50 of one species (although this may be the case) but 50 overall, for example if you have 30 chickens, 15 geese, 4 ducks and 1 rhea you need to register.

The decision to restrict the requirement to register to flocks of 50 or more birds, was based on advice from experts who consider that smaller flocks are less likely to play a significant role in the spread of disease. It is a priority to focus on gathering information from these larger flocks. However, it is possible for owners of smaller flocks to register on a voluntary basis should they so wish and we would encourage them to do so.

In Scotland the requirement for registration currently applies to commercial premises with 50 or more birds. Similar legislation to England and Wales, as detailed above, will apply in Scotland in due course.

A "commercial premises" means premises where poultry are kept for commercial purposes. This requirement does **not** apply to premises where all poultry (and their eggs) are kept by their owners for their own consumption or as pets.

Is it safe to eat poultry or game?

The Food Standards Agency considers that there is no evidence of infection due to eating poultry meat that has been thoroughly cooked. The virus can survive in faecal material from infected birds and can be spread through inhalation and ingestion, but is destroyed by cooking.

What is avian flu?

Avian flu is infection caused by a strain of influenza virus that usually infects wild or domesticated birds (particularly poultry), but occasionally crosses the species barrier and infects people. This is what we have seen recently in the cases in South East Asia.

How does avian flu affect people?

Until recently, it was thought that avian flu only rarely affected people and caused only mild disease such as conjunctivitis. Since 1997, however, more severe illness has occurred in people who have become infected with avian flu strains following close exposure to infected birds. One strain of bird flu – H5N1 – has been associated with a very high death rate when people have been affected.

Why are we concerned about avian flu?

Experts believe a pandemic virus may emerge from an avian influenza virus, for example if it mixes with a human flu virus, creating a new virus which is highly infectious for people.

The avian (bird) flu that is affecting poultry flocks in Asia and other regions at the present time has increased experts' concern. The avian flu virus (H5N1) which is causing these outbreaks has affected some people who have been in close contact with infected birds causing serious illness. Scientists fear that this virus may change with time to make it a more likely threat for people and that it could start another pandemic.

Is there a vaccine for avian flu?

Not at the moment for people. An H5N1 vaccine is being developed against the current H5N1 viruses.

Is there a treatment for avian flu?

Antiviral drugs are likely to be helpful in treating avian flu. To be effective, antiviral drugs have to be taken within 48 hours of the symptoms starting. The government has a stockpile of antiviral drugs for emergency use and is building up this stockpile against the start of a pandemic.

Should I not travel to countries with avian flu?

There are no travel restrictions for persons travelling to South East Asia . However, previously recommended advice should continue to be exercised by those who are travelling to these regions:

- Avoid visiting live animal markets and poultry farms
- Avoid contact with surfaces contaminated with animal faeces
- Do not attempt to bring any live poultry products back to the UK

Further information can be found on the [Department of Health website](http://www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu) (www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu) and the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office website](http://www.fco.gov.uk) (www.fco.gov.uk).

I've just come back from a country where there's avian flu, and I feel ill – what should I do?

It is highly unlikely that avian influenza is the cause, and much more likely that human influenza will be responsible because normal influenza circulates in many areas of southeast Asia from winter to spring. However, if you develop a respiratory illness which you consider is severe enough to warrant treatment and:

- You have visited a country affected by highly pathogenic avian influenza, and
- You have had contact with live poultry (chickens, ducks, geese) or pigs or places that house them in the these countries in the seven days prior to onset of illness

you should contact your general practitioner by telephone. Your GP will obtain further advice if necessary.

What is a pandemic Flu?

Flu that spreads rapidly to affect almost all countries and regions around the world. Flu pandemics occur when a new strain of influenza virus appears, which most people have no immunity to. There were three flu pandemics in the last century. They generally affect more people, cause more severe illness and result in much more serious disruption to society than the 'ordinary' flu we see in the UK each winter.

What happened in the previous pandemics?

Previous pandemics affected large numbers of the population, caused many deaths and resulted in severe economic and social disruption. 'Spanish' flu occurred just after the First World War and caused millions of deaths worldwide. 'Asian' flu in the late 1950s and 'Hong Kong' flu in the late 1960s were less severe, but had serious consequences globally.

When is the next pandemic due?

No one knows for sure. Intervals between previous pandemics have varied with no recognisable pattern. Also, a pandemic may not follow the usual seasonal pattern of 'ordinary' flu and could occur at any time of the year.

What is the difference between 'ordinary' flu and pandemic flu?

'Ordinary' flu is the flu that circulates most of the time and produces the winter flu we see in the UK every year. For most people this is an unpleasant though not life-threatening illness. The strains of virus causing this type of flu change from year to year but can be fairly reliably predicted so that an appropriate vaccine can be prepared each year.

Pandemic flu is caused when a new strain of influenza virus emerges which is markedly different from recently circulating strains. These changes cannot be predicted in the same way as the changes in 'ordinary' flu viruses, so a vaccine specifically against the new strain cannot be developed in advance.

Should I have an ordinary flu jab? Will this protect me against pandemic flu?

We recommend vaccination for all those over 65 and those who suffer from illnesses that put them at higher risk from flu - such as asthma, diabetes or serious heart or lung conditions. If you are someone who has been advised to have flu vaccination, please make sure you have made your appointment with your GP practice.

This year's flu vaccine is already in surgeries or on its way and doctors are making arrangements for vaccinating everyone at risk in the local areas.

This vaccine will not prevent someone from getting pandemic flu or avian flu, but it will protect them from the seasonal flu that will be circulating this winter.

Who will be at risk during flu pandemic?

Everyone is potentially at risk of catching flu during a flu pandemic, as few people, if anyone, will have immunity to the virus. Certain groups or age groups may be at greater risk than others; we will not know for certain who they will be until the virus starts circulating. From past experience, around a quarter (25%) of the population is likely to develop flu, although it could be more.

What contingency plans does the UK have for a flu pandemic?

The UK was one of the first countries to have a flu pandemic contingency plan in place. This 1997 was revised in March 2005 and again in October 2005.

The plan provides the overall framework for an integrated UK-wide response, escalating as a pandemic threat increases and then as the pandemic evolves.

For further information see the Department of Health website

www.dh.gov.uk/pandemicflu).

The UK plan seeks to reduce the negative health impact of a pandemic and the possible disruption it may cause to essential services and people's daily lives. This will be through the best application of measures such as antiviral treatment and immunisation (when this becomes available), and preparing the NHS and society as far as possible.

What preparations are being made in the UK?

Publishing the plan is an important step in preparing for a pandemic. The government is stockpiling enough treatment courses of antiviral drugs to treat those who may become ill in a pandemic. The Government is also working with the World Health Organization, international partners, industry and others to put us in the best possible position to develop a pandemic flu vaccine should the need arise. Improving our preparedness is a continuous process, putting into place the actions described in the plan.

What are antiviral drugs?

Antiviral drugs are special medicines for the treatment of certain viral infections and are likely to play an important role in treating pandemic flu. Treatment with antiviral drugs can be expected to shorten the duration of the disease, alleviate symptoms and reduce complications and serious illness.

Why don't we make a vaccine against pandemic flu now?

Because the virus will be new and not predictable in the way that 'ordinary' flu viruses are. Preparatory work is being undertaken to be in the best possible position to produce vaccine against a pandemic strain as quickly as possible when the need arises, but development of a vaccine will take time and a vaccine will not be available in the early stages of a pandemic.

How long would a vaccine take to produce?

On current international estimates, the vaccine will take at least four to six months to produce. There may be further delays due to unexpected technical difficulties. Once the virus has been identified and a suitable vaccine developed then large-scale production will begin as quickly as possible.

Does this mean that the use of vaccine will be prioritised?

Priority may have to be given to certain groups. Healthcare workers and other essential service key workers may need to be vaccinated first, as it will be important to maintain health and other essential services. Those groups most at risk of serious illness will be a priority to receive the vaccine as supplies increase. The government will make the decision based on advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) (an independent expert advisory committee) and the UK National Influenza Pandemic Committee.

Are there any other counter measures available?

Other public health and 'social distancing' interventions may help to limit or slow the spread of the disease and reduce its impact, especially at the onset of a flu pandemic. These include measures such as hand washing, limiting non-essential travel and discouraging mass gatherings of people.

How will we know what to do?

There will be regular updates on the television, radio and in the national press, telling people what is happening and what to do. People with mild to moderate symptoms will be advised to stay at home. Helplines will be available for advice.

How can I reduce my risk and protect my family and myself?

- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue whenever possible
- Dispose of dirty tissues promptly and carefully – bag and bin them
- Avoid non-essential travel and large crowds of people whenever possible
- Maintain good hygiene – washing hands frequently with soap and water protects against picking the virus up from surfaces and passing it on
- Clean hard surfaces (e.g. kitchen worktops, door handles) frequently, using a normal cleaning product
- Stay at home when you are sick – if you have a cough and a fever, it is best to rest at home, take medicines to relieve the symptoms and drink plenty of fluids. This will speed your recovery and help prevent the spread of infection.

If you need medical advice or assistance, phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or your GP surgery.

Why are experts concerned about a flu pandemic now?

Experts believe we should be ready for a pandemic to emerge at any time. The avian flu (often called 'bird flu') currently affecting poultry in South East Asia and other regions, including Turkey and Romania, has increased their concern.