



## TIP SHEET Protect Your Family by Learning About the Avian Flu

Nothing is more important than the health and safety of family, friends and the communities in which we live. The health of people living in some areas of the world is being threatened by outbreaks of Avian influenza - commonly called "bird flu." While Avian influenza has not yet reached the United States, learning more about it can help keep our families safe. Below is some general information about the bird flu.

**What is Avian (bird) influenza?** Avian flu is caused by viruses that occur among birds. Wild birds carry the viruses but usually do not get sick from them. Domesticated birds (including chickens, ducks and turkeys) may become infected through contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces or materials.

**Can humans become infected with the bird flu?** The bird flu has transferred to humans in a limited number of cases (outside of the U.S.) Most cases of human infection have resulted from contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. So far, the spread of the virus from person to person has been limited. However, influenza viruses have the ability to change and scientists are concerned that the virus could one day infect humans and spread from person to person.

**How likely is a widespread outbreak of the bird flu among humans?** Because these viruses do not commonly infect humans, people have little immune protection against them. If the virus were to gain the ability to spread easily from person to person, a pandemic (worldwide outbreak of disease) could begin. No one can predict when a pandemic might occur, however, experts from around the world are watching the situation very closely.

**How serious is it for a human to get the virus?** In the outbreaks in Asia, Europe and Africa, more than half of those infected with the virus died. Most cases occurred in previously healthy children and young adults. (Note: it is possible that the only cases reported were the most severe, and that the full range of illness caused by the virus has not yet been defined.)

**What can I do to protect my family?** You can begin to protect your family by taking common-sense steps to limit the spread of germs, including:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. (Always put used tissues in a waste basket. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.)
- Staying home if you are sick.

**Where can I learn more about the Avian flu and what my community is doing to prepare?**

Accurate and timely information is available at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) or through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-CDC-INFO. (This line is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TTY: 1-888-232-6348.)

These tips were compiled from a variety of sources.

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For more tip sheets, visit [www.fraser.org](http://www.fraser.org)

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