

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu or H5N1 Influenza)

Advice for Travellers

Bird flu is a type of influenza virus that affects birds, poultry, and waterfowl. On rare occasions, humans have been infected and some have died. Humans have little to no immunity against this illness, and there is no vaccine available.

Risk to travellers

There is a slight risk of getting bird flu if you travel to affected areas AND have contact with infected poultry, their feathers, droppings, secretions, or surfaces they may have contaminated. There is also a risk if you eat contaminated under-cooked eggs or poultry. The risk of catching bird flu from an infected person is very rare and probably requires prolonged and close contact with that person.

Pre-travel

Call the Travel Clinic at KFL&A Public Health at 613-549-2335 to see which destinations are currently affected:

- Check for travel restrictions and identify medical resources at your destination.
- If you have a fever, do not travel to areas affected with bird flu. You may not be allowed entry.
- Bring a travel health kit containing basic first aid and medical supplies. It should include:
 1. Oral thermometer
 2. Alcohol hand sanitizer or wipes
 3. Acetaminophen
 4. Household disinfectant
- Have a flu shot. While this will not prevent bird flu, you can decrease the chance of having human influenza confused with avian flu. All other immunizations should be up-to-date.
- Have insurance that covers medical evacuation in case of illness.

Antivirals:

The use of antiviral drugs for prevention or as standby treatment for Canadians travelling to areas where bird flu has been reported is not recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada. However, antivirals may be considered for use in specific travellers who are at increased risk of exposure to the virus, such as those culling birds, providing veterinary support to birds, investigating cases among birds or humans, or providing health care to infected humans. Individual agencies should assess and negotiate risk and protection for their employees.

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During travel to area affected by avian flu:

- Avoid contact with birds and poultry, at live animal markets, and poultry farms.
- Avoid surfaces contaminated with bird droppings and secretions.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Use hot, soapy water and lather for 15 to 20 seconds. Alternatively, use alcohol hand sanitizer or wipes especially after shaking hands, exchanging money, before eating, and after using the bathroom. If there is visible soiling, hands should be washed with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, cleanse hands first with detergent-containing wipes to remove visible soil and then use the alcohol hand sanitizer.
- Cook poultry until juices run clear and the meat is no longer pink (a minimum of 82°C or 193°F on a food thermometer), and cook eggs thoroughly as heat destroys influenza viruses.
- Practice safe food habits at all times: wash hands, surfaces, and knives in hot soapy water after handling raw poultry or eggs, keep uncooked poultry/eggs separate from cooked foods, keep uncooked poultry refrigerated or frozen, and do not eat products with raw or lightly cooked eggs like eggnog, mayonnaise, and cookie dough. These tips can also help prevent travellers' diarrhea as well.
- If possible, change seats on an airplane to avoid travellers with breathing difficulties.
- Seek medical help for any fever or flu-like symptoms during travel to bird flu affected areas.
- Travellers who become sick while travelling can locate a Canadian consular officer to assist in locating medical services and informing family or friends. See this website for more information about what to do if you become ill while abroad: www.voyage.gc.ca
- Do not travel until you are free of symptoms.

Symptoms

When a person first develops bird flu, they may feel like they have a case of severe seasonal influenza, with fever, cough, runny nose, and muscle aches, headaches, and chills. Shortly afterwards these symptoms can quickly progress to difficulty breathing and pneumonia.

Seek medical attention if you have:

- a temperature over 38°C (100.4°F),
- a cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath, and
- history of contact with poultry (e.g., visited a poultry farm, a household raising poultry, or a bird market) or a known or suspected human case of bird flu within 10 days of your symptoms beginning.

After travel

- Travellers to bird flu areas should monitor their health for 10 days after leaving the affected area.
- If you become ill with a fever, cough, difficulty breathing, or any unusual symptoms, consult a health-care provider, by phone, and let them know you have travelled to an avian-flu affected area.