



Indiana State  
Department of Health  
Epidemiology Resource Center

## Frequently Asked Questions for H7N8 Avian Influenza

### **Background**

In January 2016, a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus, H7N8, was identified on a commercial poultry farm in Dubois County, Indiana. Low-pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) H7N8 was also identified. This is the first time H7N8 viruses have been found in birds in the United States. The risk to the public is very low, and there is no food safety concern. When infected flocks are identified, the birds are quarantined, and any exposed birds are depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease.

### **What is avian influenza?**

Avian influenza refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza Type A viruses. These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.

### **Can humans be infected with H7N8?**

No human cases of H7N8 infection have been detected in the U.S. or other countries. However, some other highly pathogenic H7 avian flu viruses have infected people. Person-to-person transmission of avian influenza viruses is very rare. H7N8 does not pose a health risk to the public. Only people who have direct contact with infected birds and their waste or live on farms where infected birds have been identified are potentially at risk. People cannot contract avian influenza by driving past a poultry operation or smelling its odor.

### **How is H7N8 spread?**

Avian influenza viruses are spread through direct contact with infected birds or their waste, including contaminated bedding, feed or water. Infected birds shed the virus in their saliva, mucous and feces. Although human infection with H7N8 has never been documented, it is possible that a person might become infected if enough of the virus gets into his or her eyes, nose or mouth, or is inhaled while disturbing contaminated bedding.

### **What are the symptoms of avian influenza virus infection?**

Infection with avian influenza viruses can range in severity from conjunctivitis (pinkeye) to severe respiratory illness, such as pneumonia. In most cases, people are infected after direct contact with sick or dead birds or their waste. Symptoms in infected people can include

influenza-like illness (e.g., fever, aches, respiratory symptoms) and red, itchy eyes. However, many other respiratory viruses, including seasonal influenza viruses, cause the same symptoms.

### **How can you tell the difference between seasonal influenza and H7N8?**

Because symptoms of avian influenza can be similar to those of seasonal flu, laboratory testing is required to confirm a diagnosis. Avian influenza infections are typically diagnosed by laboratory analysis of a sample collected from the nose or throat of the sick person during the first few days of illness.

### **Is there a treatment for avian influenza?**

It is recommended that people in contact with infected birds take antiviral medication if they were not wearing appropriate personal protective equipment when handling sick or dead birds and their waste.

### **Is a high-pathogenic avian influenza more likely to cause serious illness in people than a low-pathogenic influenza?**

Pathogenicity refers to the ability of a particular virus to produce disease in experimentally infected chickens. A highly pathogenic designation does not mean that human infection will result in severe illness, and a low pathogenic virus does not signal that illness will be mild.

### **Is it safe to gather in groups in the community?**

Yes. In the unlikely event that someone in close contact with infected birds does develop H7N8, the probability of human-to-human transmission is extremely low. People who have been exposed to infected birds are not considered to be a public health risk. They are free to pursue their normal daily activities, and it is safe to have contact with them.

### **Is my food safe?**

Yes. The discovery of H7N8 poses no risk to food safety. Properly cooked eggs and poultry are still safe to eat.

### **What is ISDH doing?**

The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) works closely with federal and state animal health agencies, local public health departments and the poultry industry to identify, protect and monitor the health of poultry workers and others in direct contact with infected birds. ISDH is working with local health departments to monitor people in contact with infected birds for 10 days to make sure they don't become sick and has provided recommendations for appropriate personal protective equipment to be worn by workers involved in depopulation efforts. ISDH also has consulted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other states that experienced avian influenza outbreaks in 2015.

### **I still have questions. Where can I get more information?**

Contact the ISDH's Epidemiology Resource Center at (317) 233-7125 or the Dubois County Health Department at (812) 481-7050, or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's avian flu page at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/index.htm>.