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Avian Flu Concerns: Food Safety and Emergency Food Storage

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As of May 2006, there have been no findings of the Asian strain H5N1 highly pathogenic avian (bird) flu circulating in wild or domestic birds in the United States. This may soon change. There are two concerns to human health related to the avian flu. The first is that prolonged contact with infected birds has led to illness and death in a few persons outside of the U.S. Secondly, a more dangerous concern is that the avian flu will mutate to one that easily transmits from one human being to another. Prudent preparations for such events are underway by all levels of government agencies. This includes concerns over the safety of eating potentially infected poultry or eggs and home emergency planning.

The risk of consumer exposure to avian flu virus through foods in the United States is very low. Nearly all of the poultry and eggs consumed in the United States are produced domestically under USDA, FDA, and state departments of agriculture inspection. All of these agencies are monitoring commercial and

small farms for any appearance of the virus. Another barrier to the avian flu virus is that the USDA prohibits the importation of poultry or eggs from counties with confirmed bird flu cases and monitors imports from all other countries.



Cook Poultry to 165°F

Food safety measures for avian influenza virus

- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling raw poultry and eggs.
- Prevent cross contamination of raw poultry with other foods.
 - Wash countertops, knives, cutting boards, and other utensils with hot soapy water to prevent cross-contamination from contaminated poultry and eggs to other foods.
 - Carefully wrap raw poultry to prevent juices from contaminating refrigerator or freezer surfaces or cross-contaminating other foods.
- Follow recommended cooking times and temperatures for eggs. Cook foods containing eggs thoroughly (cook until the egg yolk and egg white are firm; scrambled eggs should not be runny, and casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 165 degrees Fahrenheit).
- For recipes that call for raw or undercooked eggs (e.g., Caesar dressing and frozen custard) use pasteurized eggs. Pasteurized eggs products are available in the grocery store. Alternatively, they can be prepared at home (See: <http://www.georgiaeggs.org/pages/pasteurization.html>).

Preparing Emergency Food Storage

For Utahns who currently have emergency food storage supplies there are no additional needs. For others, some scientists are recommending preparing for the “panic” rather than the pandemic. A panic could result in a run on grocery items making them unavailable for several days while grocery stores restock. In that case a 72 emergency food and water supply would be prudent. If a pandemic threatens, then the CDC has suggested people have available a 2-week emergency food supply (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/Individuals.pdf>).

Questions and Answers

Does refrigeration or freezing affect the avian flu virus?

Refrigeration and freezing do not kill influenza virus.

What might happen if someone undercooks eggs or poultry?

Both the US FDA and the USDA discourage consumers from consuming raw eggs. The major foodborne illness of concern is *Salmonella* and not the influenza virus. Fully cooking eggs and poultry is the safest means to prevent foodborne illness.

If I get a flu shot here in Utah, will that protect me from avian influenza?

Generally, no. Only a specific avian flu vaccine would work and these are currently not available (Nov. 2006).

How do we know our own farm-produced poultry or eggs are safe?

If the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus were to contaminate farm poultry, the poultry would rapidly (48 hours) become very sick and many would

die. Symptoms would be obvious to farmers. Farmers should consult local health officials immediately.

Important Contact Information

- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888 MPHOTline (1-888 674-6854)
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [Food Information Line](#) 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366).
- Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (801) 538-7101.
- Utah Department of Health (801) 538-6111.
- Your Local Utah Health Department.
- Utah State University Cooperative Extension: David Frame, 435-283-7586
Brian Nummer, 435-797-2116
- USDA: Report Sick Farm Birds at 1-866-536-7593.
- Utah: Report sick or dead wild birds at 1-866-4-USA-WS or Utah (801) 538-4703.
- U.S. government one stop Web site: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

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