

Pandemic/Avian Influenza Talking Points

With the increasing spread of avian influenza among birds in Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe and the continuing appearance of cases of avian influenza in humans, the risk of pandemic influenza continues to grow. **A pandemic is a global disease outbreak.**

- **Pandemic Influenza is different from avian influenza.**

Avian influenza refers to a large group of influenza viruses that primarily affect birds. On rare occasions, these bird viruses can infect other species, including pigs and humans. The vast majority of avian influenza viruses do not infect humans. The “bird flu” currently circulating is the H5N1 subtype.

A human pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus, such as the avian H5N1, emerges, starts infecting humans and spreading as easily as normal influenza – by coughing and sneezing – and results in worldwide infection, illness and death. Because the virus is new, the human immune system will have no pre-existing immunity. This makes it more likely for people who contract pandemic influenza to experience more serious disease than that caused by normal influenza.

- **The threat of pandemic influenza is real.**

Two of the three prerequisites for a “pandemic” have been met:

- 1) A new virus subtype emerges – Met: the avian influenza H5N1 subtype
- 2) The new virus must multiply in humans and cause serious illness – Met: Human cases, with known exposure to infected birds, have been documented in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Iraq, Thailand, Turkey and Viet Nam since 2003 (with a high mortality rate).
- 3) *The virus must be transmitted efficiently person-to-person with sustained transmission – Unmet*

- **Avian Influenza Update**

- **As of May 2007, there have been over 260 human cases of avian influenza worldwide, with a mortality rate of over 56%**
- Current poultry outbreaks are the largest and most severe recorded in history
- There has been no H5N1 virus detected in the United States, either in poultry or in humans
- In the State of Georgia, commercial poultry is being screened for all avian influenzas and wild birds are being tested on a limited basis

- **Public Health Preparedness Activities**

- Enhanced surveillance for normal influenza, utilizing the sentinel provider program: a group of community physicians who agree to report numbers of influenza-like illness on a weekly basis
- Development of national, state and local pandemic influenza response plans, the local plan to be incorporated into the County Emergency Operations Plan
- Delivery of prevention and awareness presentations
- Frequent interaction and information sharing between hospital infection control practitioners, school nurses and sentinel providers
- Education of the public regarding the availability of preparedness checklists for businesses, individuals & families, faith-based organizations and schools: www.pandemicflu.gov

- **What can you do?**

- **Get your flu shot!** Right now, there is no vaccine available for avian influenza, but getting your regular flu shot and being current on all your immunizations may help protect you from getting secondary infections and other serious illnesses associated with avian influenza.
- **Stay healthy!** Cover your mouth & nose when you sneeze or cough, clean hands often, avoiding touching your eyes/nose/mouth, and stay home when you are sick (check with a health care provider when needed), get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids & eat nutritious food.