

# *“Bird flu:” It’s not in your food*

From:

<http://www.nationalchickencouncil.org/bird-flu-its-not-in-your-food/>

*(An article written for, and still available on, the poultry industry website reassuring consumers about food safety in light to avian influenza or “bird flu.”)*

## **“Bird Flu”: It’s Not in Your Food**

You’ve probably heard about “bird flu.” It’s the human version of the flu that occurs in birds called “avian influenza.” Some people fear it could be the basis for an influenza epidemic among humans similar to the “Spanish flu” way back in 1918.

This hasn’t happened. It may never happen. There are many barriers – some of them natural and some of them human-made – between avian influenza in birds and an influenza epidemic in humans.

For now, the idea that “bird flu” could cause a devastating human pandemic is only conjecture and a storyline for science fiction. We believe it will stay that way.

The most dangerous type of avian influenza is called “highly pathogenic H5N1.” This has occurred primarily in Asian countries. We have NEVER had it in the United States.

Also very important is the fact that avian influenza is not a foodborne disease. That is, you are not going to get “bird flu” by eating properly cooked poultry.

Click for some important facts about “bird flu,” avian influenza, chickens, turkeys, and people: (to Q&A below)

As usual, you should continue to take the normal steps to ensure the quality and safety of poultry products – chicken, turkey, and eggs. Click for safe food handling tips. (below)

Home > “Bird Flu”: It’s Not in Your Food > Questions and Answers on Avian Influenza (“Bird Flu”)

## **Questions and Answers on Avian Influenza (“Bird Flu”)**

1. What is avian influenza?
2. Can human beings get “bird flu” from live birds such as chickens?

3. Do other birds get avian influenza?
4. If a person gets “bird flu,” can he or she give it easily to other human beings?
5. Are birds in the United States tested for “bird flu?”
6. Are poultry products inspected?
7. Safe food handling tips

1. *What is avian influenza?*

Avian influenza is a disease of birds that particularly affects domestic poultry such as chickens, turkeys and ducks. All forms of avian influenza are caused by viruses. Some forms of avian influenza have only mild symptoms in birds; some are more serious; and a few cause devastating illness resulting in death for most birds in a flock.

An avian influenza epidemic infecting many poultry flocks in Asia several years ago also infected some people, resulting in 330 human deaths worldwide. This was called highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1. The outbreak was brought under control.

2. *Can human beings get “bird flu” from live birds such as chickens?*

Scientists say avian influenza is not easily transmitted from birds to humans. It is not impossible, but it doesn’t happen easily or very often.

When people in Asia got “bird flu” from live domestic chickens and other types of poultry, it usually occurred when people slaughtered infected birds and got blood and excrement on their hands. In some Asian countries, it is even a custom for humans to consume raw poultry blood.

These are obvious risk factors for the transmission of the virus from live birds to people. Unless human beings are directly exposed to blood or excrement of infected poultry, avian influenza is a disease of birds, not humans.

3. *Do other birds get avian influenza?*

Some other species of birds are known to pick up avian influenza from poultry. In the case of H5N1, the disease is so severe that the other birds will often die before they spread it over a wide region. In the 2004-2006 outbreaks, some people thought the Asian form of avian influenza could be carried to the United States by wild birds flying from Siberia to Alaska. It didn’t happen.

4. *If a person gets “bird flu,” can he or she give it easily to other human beings?*

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “sustained transmission” of avian influenza from human to human has NOT occurred. Despite the fact that millions of birds got sick and died in the middle of human populations in Southeast Asia in 2004-2006,

“sustained transmission” did not occur. The disease had plenty of opportunities to become a serious human disease – and fortunately didn’t do it.

5. *Are birds in the United States tested for “bird flu?”*

The commercial chicken industry, which accounts for the overwhelming majority of all the chicken consumed in the United States, has a program to test every flock of broiler chickens before they go to market. These are the chickens that are raised for their meat, and these flocks are the source of nearly all the products you find in the supermarket or in restaurants. Since this program began several years ago, not one flock has been found to be infected with H5N1. The turkey industry also has biosecurity measures in place. Any chicken or turkey flock found to be infected with H5N1 or any of the serious forms of avian influenza would be destroyed and would not enter the food system.

The U.S. government continues to monitor large-scale mortality events in wild birds as part of a national effort to quickly detect and respond to outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as avian influenza. Throughout 2006-2010, the USDA and its partners collected more than 350,000 wild bird and environmental samples as part of a surveillance effort for highly pathogenic avian influenza. To date, no highly pathogenic avian influenza has been found in wild bird populations in the continental United States, Hawaii, or Alaska.

6. *Are poultry products inspected?*

U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors check flocks of chickens and turkey before they are processed for food, and every animal is inspected after slaughter to ensure that it is wholesome and properly labeled. Animals showing any signs of disease are rejected.

**Safe food handling tips**

As usual, you should continue to take the normal steps to ensure the quality and safety of poultry products – chicken, turkey, and eggs.

Keep the product refrigerated or frozen until ready to cook.

Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.

Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods.

Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils and hands after touching raw meat or poultry.

Cook thoroughly.

Keep hot foods hot.

Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

**Minimum cooking temperature:**

Poultry is safe when it is cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit. It’s best to use a thermometer to make sure this temperature is reached.

While poultry is safe at 165 degrees F, it may be necessary to cook it to a higher temperature to reach a satisfactory level of “doneness.”

The following chart provides the temperature to which your food is not only safe, but is the best quality:

Chicken, Turkey White Meat: 170 degrees F

Chicken, Turkey Dark Meat: 180 degrees F

Ground Chicken, Turkey: 165 degrees F