



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT AVIAN INFLUENZA (7-22-15)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is avian influenza (AI)?

Avian influenza (AI), a virus commonly known as the “bird flu,” is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. In late winter and spring 2015, AI affected hens on more than 200 egg, turkey and chicken farms, which had significant negative impacts on the U.S. egg and poultry community.

As a consumer, what should I know about avian influenza in the U.S.?

America’s egg farmers understand and share consumers’ concerns about AI. Maintaining the health and well-being of hens and producing safe, healthy eggs is of utmost importance to farmers. Together with turkey and chicken producers, egg farmers responded quickly and implemented comprehensive measures to limit the spread of avian influenza.

Is AI a risk to public health? Can humans contract the disease?

The identified strains of AI found on U.S. egg and turkey farms have not affected any humans and are not considered a risk to public health.

Can I catch AI from the eggs or meat I eat?

No. Avian influenza can’t be transmitted through safely handled and properly cooked eggs, chicken or turkey. As a reminder, all eggs, chicken and turkey should be cooked thoroughly and at the recommended temperatures to reduce the risk of food-borne illnesses. To learn more about cooking and handling eggs, visit USDA’s [food safety question and answer page](#) or the [Egg Safety Center](#).

How did AI spread to farms?

It is believed that AI is transmitted through wild birds and waterfowl, either through direct contact with other birds or indirectly if the disease is carried onto a farm by humans, vehicles or equipment. Animal health experts continue to evaluate ways the disease has spread.

What strains of AI are there?

There are both high-pathogenic and low-pathogenic strains of the disease. Pathogenicity refers to the ability of the virus to produce disease. High-pathogenic AI is the most virulent, infectious strain of the disease and is usually fatal to birds. Low-pathogenic AI may cause no symptoms at all in birds or only cause minor illness. The 2015 outbreak that resulted in the loss of so many birds was a high-path strain of AI.

Where has highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) been found?

The presence of HPAI was confirmed in commercial egg and turkey flocks in a number of states located along major US migratory bird flyways. In response, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) increased surveillance and testing programs, especially along the major migration flyways.

What happens to birds that are infected with AI?

AI is a respiratory disease and will make birds very sick or cause their death. High-pathogenic AI can be fatal to entire flocks. Birds in flocks that test positive for AI and do not die from the disease must be euthanized in order to prevent the spread of the disease to other flocks. Unfortunately, there is no current way to “cure” AI in birds.

What is United Egg Producers (UEP) doing about this situation?

America's egg farmers continue to be vigilant in keeping their flocks free from disease and assuring the safety of eggs and egg products. There is close collaboration between UEP and others in the egg, chicken and turkey farming communities to share information and prevent AI from further spread. In addition, state and federal regulatory authorities and animal health experts are working hand in hand to help farms affected by AI, limit occurrence of this disease and enhance surveillance programs.

What preventive measures are in place to protect humans from this disease and to prevent the disease from spreading to other flocks?

Egg farmers employ a number of rigorous biosecurity guidelines, including, but not limited to:

- Restricting on-farm access to essential employees only;
- Following on-farm disinfecting procedures, such as the use of foot baths and vehicle disinfection;
- Housing hens indoors to prevent access to wild birds and waterfowl;
- Limiting movement between farm operations;
- Requiring protective gear be used at all times for anyone who enters egg farms; and
- Working closely with animal health experts and veterinarians to monitor flocks.

What can consumers and business customers expect from egg prices and supply? There is no doubt that the rapid spread of AI disrupted the availability of eggs, which lead to price fluctuation. Egg farmers across the US are committed to doing all that is possible to minimize disruption and produce a consistent, affordable supply of eggs.