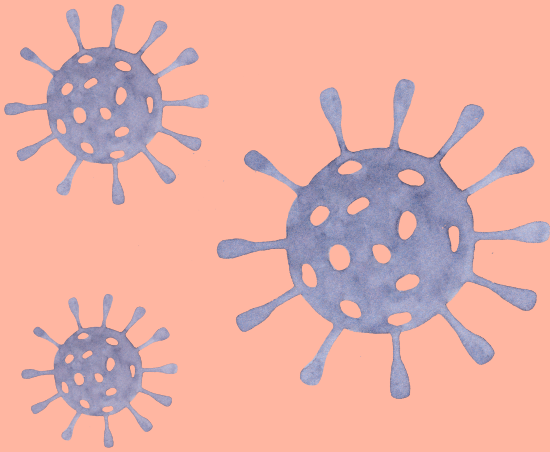


What is avian influenza and how does it spread?

Avian influenza, also known as bird flu, is a highly contagious viral disease that affects domestic and wild birds. The disease has also been detected, on rare occasions, in mammals, including humans. Beyond its impacts on animal health, the disease has devastating effects on the poultry industry, threatening workers' livelihoods, food security and international trade.



Avian influenza can easily spread through:

- secretions and excretions from infected birds, especially faeces
- contaminated feed and water (in farms or live birds market)
- contact with contaminated footwear, vehicles and equipment
- cross-border movements of birds, including wild birds migration and illegal trade

Q & A:

Avian influenza in cats



Can cats catch avian influenza?

While it primarily affects poultry and wild birds, avian influenza can occasionally be transmitted to mammals, including cats. Cats are unusual hosts of avian influenza.

How do cats catch avian influenza?

Exposure to infected wild birds or poultry, or associated food products, are modes of infection for cats. However, further studies are required to increase our understanding of this question.



What are the symptoms of avian influenza in cats?

When infected, cats can show a range of clinical signs including listlessness, loss of appetite, severe depression, fever, dyspnoea (difficulty breathing), neurological disease, respiratory and enteric signs, jaundice, and death. These signs are expected to develop within a few days of exposure to the virus. As with many viral infections, some cats may only show mild signs.

Can cats die from avian influenza?

Yes, some cats have died from avian influenza.

What is the difference between influenza infection and cat flu in cats?

'Cat flu' is a common term used to describe disease in cats characterized by signs like a common cold in humans (e.g., runny eyes, sore mouth or throat, dribbling, sneezing, fever). It can be caused by various viruses (calicivirus, herpes virus) or bacteria (*bordetella bronchiseptica*, *chlamydia felis*). Vaccines to 'cat flu' are commonly available from veterinarians; they provide protection, but they are not 100% effective.

On the other hand, influenza infection in cats is not the same as cat flu – it relates to an infection of a cat with an influenza virus. No commercially available influenza vaccines are available for cats.

Can cats be infected with influenza viruses other than avian influenza?

Cats have been known to be infected with several other subtypes and strains of influenza viruses. Usually, infection is subclinical or only causes mild disease. However, the severity of disease may be exacerbated by stress or other chronic illness. Factors that determine species susceptibility to different influenza viruses are not well understood and require further research.

Can cats give avian influenza to humans?

Cats are not significant epidemiological vectors of avian influenza to humans or other animals. While it's unlikely that people would catch avian influenza through contact with an infected wild, stray, feral, or domestic cat, it is possible—especially if there is prolonged and unprotected exposure to an infected animal. Precautions should be taken when handling a sick animal, whether it is a beloved pet or a wild animal.

What is the risk of avian influenza being transmitted from a sick cat to a human?

The risk of transmission of avian influenza from a sick cat to a human is currently very low or negligible.



What precautions should be taken for suspected cases of avian influenza in cats?

- Suspected cases of avian influenza in cats should be isolated from other pets, and individuals handling them should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Contact your veterinarian if you suspect your cat is unwell and has been exposed to avian influenza.
- If you experience flu-like symptoms, consult a doctor.

What precautions can be taken to avoid exposing cats to avian influenza?

- Where possible avoid direct contact with sick poultry, fallen wild birds, objects with traces of bird droppings, or surfaces or water sources (e.g.: ponds, troughs, lakes) that might be contaminated with saliva, feces, or bodily fluids from birds.
- Upon returning home, ensure that your shoes are kept out of reach of cats.
- After coming home from outdoor areas that may have bird droppings, clean your shoes.
- Disinfect the surface where you placed your shoes.
- Follow regular hygiene practices, such as washing hands with warm water and soap, particularly after returning home and before handling food.
- Maintain hygienic conditions while preparing meals for cats. Avoid feeding cats raw poultry meat, particularly if avian influenza outbreaks are reported in the region.
- Stay informed about the latest announcements from your local authorities. The risk of cats being exposed to avian influenza will be greater if avian influenza is reported in your area.

Resources

- WOAHP web portal on avian influenza
- Poland statement
- OFFLU first statement on avian influenza in cats in Poland, 28 June 2023
- CDC website: Bird Flu in Pets and Other Animals | Avian Influenza (Flu)

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