

Health risks and prevention of

**seasonal
influenza**

**avian
influenza**

**influenza
pandemic**



It is important to distinguish between seasonal influenza, avian influenza and influenza pandemic.

Seasonal Influenza

Seasonal influenza is NOT the same as avian influenza.

Health risk

Seasonal influenza outbreaks are caused by sub-types of influenza virus that already exist among people. In Hong Kong, it is more prevalent in periods from January to March and from July to August every year. For healthy individuals, seasonal influenza is usually self-limiting with recovery in two to seven days.

Measures to take

As Hong Kong moves into the ordinary flu peak season, the public should further fortify their health. Influenza vaccination is an effective means in preventing influenza and its complications and is recommended for elderly and patients with chronic diseases. Observing good personal and environmental hygiene (washing hands for example), maintaining good ventilation, avoiding crowded places if one is feeling unwell and developing good body resistance through adopting a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise and a balanced diet, are ways to prevent seasonal influenza.

One should put on a mask and consult a doctor if one develops flu symptoms, such as fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, headache and muscle ache. Take good care of your body and facilitate speedy recovery by staying home and taking ample rest, consuming adequate amounts of water and nutritious and easily digestible food and keeping good ventilation.

If one has not come into close contact with infected live poultry or birds or their droppings, there is no need to be unduly alarmed about acquiring avian flu.

Avian Influenza

Health risk

Avian influenza mostly occurs in birds and the risk of avian flu in poultry and migratory birds remains high.

Measures to take

Although there have been cases of avian flu in humans, there is so far no evidence of efficient transmission. Most human cases reported were the result of contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. Avian influenza in humans causes a wide range of flu-like symptoms with or without diarrhoea which may progress rapidly to respiratory failure, multi-organ failure and even death.

To prevent avian influenza in humans, we should avoid touching live poultry or their droppings, wash hands thoroughly immediately after contacting live poultry and cook poultry and eggs thoroughly before eating.

Travelling

When travelling overseas to places where there are outbreaks of avian influenza in poultry, one should avoid contacting live poultry and birds. If one develops flu symptoms, one should consult a doctor and let the doctor know if you have come into contact with poultry or travelled to places with an outbreak of avian influenza.

Ways to handle birds

Members of the public should observe good personal hygiene and avoid contact with wild birds, their droppings and feathers. If they have come into contact with such, they should thoroughly wash their hands with water and liquid soap, wet tissue paper (soaked with alcohol), or alcohol-based handrub. If a sick or dead wild bird is found, the Government Hotline 1823 should be informed to arrange for collection for laboratory testing.

Influenza Pandemic

Health risk

Influenza pandemic occurs roughly every 10 to 50 years and may strike anytime. It emerges as a result of influenza virus undergoing major genetic changes. Influenza pandemic is usually associated with a great number of cases, higher severity of illness, a higher death toll and consequently greater social and economic disruption.

The World Health Organization has advised that there is no influenza pandemic anywhere in the world at this stage, although vigilance and surveillance need to remain high.

Measures to take

When a pandemic strikes, it may not be possible to totally eliminate the risk of infection, but one can reduce the risk by stepping up hygienic practices, avoiding crowded places, wearing a mask if one takes care of the sick, visits a clinic or develops flu-like symptoms, and paying attention to and complying with the guidelines issued by the Government in respect of travelling, port health control and suspension of public events, etc. Government will make timely announcements and give more specific advice to the public on measures to take in the event of a pandemic.

This advice is prepared by the Centre for Health Protection and will be updated regularly.

Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health
Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
November 2005