## **Concerned About Bird Flu or Avian Influenza?**

- Workers suffering from other illnesses should not cull or transport potentially infected flocks
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling animals
- Workers must be careful when removing and storing any clothing, gloves or hats that may have been exposed to live poultry dust or aerosols as they can lead to cross-contamination of clean surfaces with the virus, if it were present
- All disposable PPE should be properly discarded

#### How long can the avian influenza virus survive in the environment?

The AI virus can survive in the environment for weeks, especially if the viruses are connected with soil, manure, soiled litter. Thorough cleaning and disinfection procedures with bleach or similar sanitizers will destroy AI viruses.

#### Is chicken and turkey safe to eat?

Yes, experts say properly cooked and handled poultry products do not pose any food safety risk. In the unlikely event that Al were to make it past the live animal controls and processing system, it would be easily killed by the normal cooking temperatures for poultry. For more information on poultry safety, visit www.poultrysafety.org and/or the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health link listed under Helpful Contacts.

#### **Helpful Contacts**

1-800-35-NIOSH

American Meat Institute www.poultrysafety.org

**Centers for Disease Control** www.cdc.gov

National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH)
http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/avianflu/

# Information for Employees Working in the Meat and Poultry Industry



#### Concerned About Bird Flu or Avian Influenza? Information for Employees Working in the Meat and Poultry Industry

#### What is avian influenza or 'Bird Flu'?

Bird flu or avian influenza is a contagious disease of birds caused by a virus called avian influenza (AI). It can be spread easily among wild birds and can infect unprotected domestic poultry.

Avian influenza is usually characterized as either high pathogenic or low pathogenic, depending on the risk it poses to birds. It also is identified by many different strains. For example, the strain making news in 2006 in Asia, Europe and Africa is called high pathogenic H5N1. High pathogenic avian influenza makes poultry extremely ill and many die or are destroyed in an effort to control the disease.

### What is the U.S. doing to prevent the type of avian influenza now making news?

The U.S. has a 'multi-firewall' strategy in place that aims to prevent the disease from crossing U.S. borders, detect it if it does occur and contain and destroy it rapidly. These firewalls include careful import restrictions on regions of the world that have detected the disease, aggressive surveillance by both industry and government and aggressive contingency plans to contain and destroy affected flocks. The poultry industry is also monitoring flocks very carefully to assure that any incidence of AI will be detected and dealt with rapidly.

#### Do humans get avian influenza?

Human infection with AI is extremely rare. According to the Centers for Disease Control, most cases of AI infections in humans result from direct contact with infected live poultry or contaminated surfaces.

In other nations, in some unusual cases, the high pathogenic H5N1 has caused illnesses and even deaths in humans in direct, day-to-day contact with infected birds. These infections have almost always involved backyard, neighborhood or small community operations where poultry and humans share living space and other environments. In areas where poultry production is secure, tightly controlled and monitored

for potential bird disease, people have not been infected with H5N1.

Controlled poultry production and careful biosecurity procedures in the U.S. help protect both poultry and human health.

#### Has avian influenza occurred in the United States?

Every year or two, Al viruses are detected in poultry flocks. These flocks are contained and destroyed so the infection does not spread. No outbreaks of the high pathogenic H5N1 virus have occurred in the U.S. However, because these viruses can be carried by birds as they migrate around the world, it is possible that the high pathogenic H5N1 virus could be detected in wild birds, and possibly domestic poultry operations, at some point.

#### Am I at risk working with live or processed poultry?

The risk to people involved in processing live poultry, carcasses and poultry parts is very low because there are many procedures to keep any poultry infected with H5N1 out of the food supply system. Extensive monitoring of flocks for H5N1 is ongoing by poultry companies and the U.S. government. This monitoring ensures that only poultry testing negative for H5N1 will enter the food supply.

In addition, because high pathogenic H5N1 Al virus is such a serious disease for birds, it would be unlikely that an infected bird could survive transport to a plant. Federal veterinarians at poultry plants also screen poultry arriving to ensure that only healthy birds are processed. This means that the chance of plant workers coming into contact with the virus is extremely low.

# But I work in a grow-out operation. What safety precautions should I be taking when working with live poultry?

Education and proper precautions are the key to staying healthy.

Safety guidelines for meat and poultry workers have been written by the World Health Organization, International Animal Health Office, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and U.S. National Wildlife Health Center. While the safety precautions written by each of these organizations are pages long, some of the key messages are as follows:

If the AI virus has not been detected on the farm:

- Personnel should follow all company biosecurity procedures and report any deviations from these procedures
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling animals
- Personnel should wear personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimize direct contact with the live birds, especially on the hands and feet
- Hand disinfection should be done after handling birds or working in the grow-out areas
- Unvaccinated employees should receive the current season's influenza vaccine

If Al virus has been detected on the farm:

- Cullers and transporters should use PPE, including:
   Coveralls, impermeable apron or surgical gown with long cuffed sleeves plus an impermeable apron, heavy duty rubber gloves that can be disinfected, appropriate particulate respirators (N95 respirator masks are best), goggles and boots or boot covers that can be disinfected or discarded, respectively.
- Hand disinfection should be required following any exposure to the live or dead birds
- Sanitation crews should use PPE and hand sanitation procedures as well
- Workers in direct contact with potentially infected birds should consider vaccination, be given antiviral drugs daily for the duration of the time during which they are in contact with infected poultry, and should be monitored for health status