

## I am travelling to a country affected by bird flu. What should I do?

Check the HPSC website [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) for the latest travel advice

- Avoid any contact with live poultry and wild birds
- Avoid visiting live animal markets and poultry farms
- Avoid contact with surfaces contaminated with animal droppings
- Don't handle dead birds
- Don't handle or eat undercooked or raw poultry, egg or duck dishes
- Exercise good personal hygiene with frequent hand washing
- Don't bring any live poultry or poultry products (e.g. feathers) back to Ireland

For further information call 1850 24 1850 or visit [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)



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# Avian influenza (Bird flu)



## What is bird flu?

Bird flu is an infectious disease of birds caused by influenza viruses. There may be little or no obvious disease in wild waterfowl. However, but sometimes large outbreaks of highly infectious disease occur in domestic poultry leading to large numbers of deaths.

## Are there different types of bird flu?

There are many different strains of bird flu viruses. The H5N1 strain has caused most of the outbreaks since late 2003 and is currently the strain of greatest concern to human health.

## Can bird flu viruses cause infections in people?

Up to now, human infection with bird flu has been very rare. It has mainly been caused by close contact with live infected birds or their droppings, or following slaughtering, plucking, butchering or preparing diseased poultry for eating. There have been reports of a limited number of cases in which it may have spread from person-to-person.

## What are the symptoms?

Most people infected with bird flu get fever (38°C or higher) followed by flu-like symptoms, including cough, runny nose, sore throat, and shortness of breath. Diarrhoea is often present early on in the illness, but may start up to one week before the flu-like symptoms. People can also have stomach pain or vomiting or headache.

## Why is it so important to prevent bird flu infections in people?

It is still very unusual for people to catch bird flu. However, when somebody does catch it, they become very ill and more than half of those who have picked

up the disease from birds have died. Flu viruses are by their nature very changeable. The virus can change so that it becomes easily spread from person-to-person. It can also change if a person catches bird flu when they already ill with normal flu. This could allow the two viruses to mix. The bird flu virus could then change to a form that allows it to spread easily from person-to-person. If this happens it could start a world-wide outbreak, known as pandemic flu.

## What can the public do to prevent bird flu?

- Avoid touching live poultry or their droppings
- Don't handle any dead poultry or wild birds
- Wash your hands well with soap and water for about 20 seconds immediately after contact with live poultry, birds or their droppings. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands. Washing your hands regularly is one of the most important ways to protect yourself against bird flu.

## Is there a vaccine against bird flu?

**No.** For now there is no vaccine to prevent bird flu in humans.

## Can regular flu vaccine prevent bird flu?

**No.** Regular flu vaccine doesn't prevent bird flu. The vaccine prevents infection with human flu and can cut the risk of a person becoming sick with human flu and bird flu at the same time. This can prevent the two types of flu mixing and becoming more easily spread from person-to-person.