

Information for Kindergartens & Schools

What is “avian influenza”

The term “fowl pest” (the correct term is actually “avian influenza”) refers to a disease that affects poultry (hens, turkeys, wild birds) as a result of avian influenza viruses. There are different virus strains; the current strain is the so-called H5N1-Virus, an aggressive pathogen that causes severe damage to poultry stocks because most of the infected birds perish from the disease. That is why it is also referred to as “fowl pest”. In colloquial language the terms fowl pest and avian influenza are often used synonymously. Human infection with avian influenza viruses is generally extremely rare.

Why is “avian influenza” so dangerous?

It is important to realise that we are currently dealing with a worldwide veterinary problem, namely an animal disease called fowl pest (“avian influenza”). The only danger for humans is that the virus could possibly change and become directly transmissible to humans. However, it is impossible to predict how and whether such a change will ever happen.

Where does “avian influenza” occur?

Originally, the H5N1 virus (current cause of “avian influenza”) appeared mainly in poultry in the Asian regions. However, recently a number of cases have been reported in Europe, for example in Germany, France, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Italy, and also in Austria. So far the cases in Austria have always involved wild birds that perished from fowl pest, however, and not farm poultry (hens, turkeys, etc.).

Can “avian influenza” be transmitted to humans?

In principle, “avian influenza” is only transmitted from animals to animals. Although it is possible for humans to get the disease from an infected animal, this is extremely rare and will happen only if there is very close contact between the animal and the human, for example in Asia, where humans and animals live together in very close quarters. Cases of direct transmission of the virus from one human to another human are not known.

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Therefore, please remember: In those cases of human infection that have so far occurred in Asia, the humans always had very intensive contact with the infected animals. Although this disease is dangerous for humans, it will only be fatal if it is not treated or treated too late.

What is being done to prevent “avian influenza” from spreading in Austria?

The Federal Minister of Health and Women's Issues has ordered measures to prevent the transmission of fowl pest to Austrian farm poultry. The most important measures currently in force are:

- All owners of poultry and other birds must report to their district administration authority.
- All poultry must be kept in enclosed barns or cages.
- Any wild birds found dead must be reported to the veterinary officer at the competent district administration authority.

In addition to these rules, which apply throughout Austria, protection and monitoring zones have been established around the sites where infected wild birds have so far been found, in which additional specific measures apply. Details can be found on the homepage of the Federal Ministry of Health and Women's Issues at www.bmgf.gv.at.

What can the individual do?

Anyone who finds a dead water bird (e.g. ducks, geese, swans, heron, cormorant) must report this to the responsible district administration authority or to the police. Thereby it is very important to specify the exact location.

Note: Other dead birds, i.e. birds that are not water birds, do not have to be reported.

How can we protect ourselves against infection?

As already mentioned, virus transmission from animals to humans is extremely unlikely. In order to eliminate any risk, contact with sick or dead animals should be avoided. This means that if you find a sick or dead bird, you should report it but never touch the animal yourself. Children should also be kept away from these animals! Children should be taught never to play with dead birds. If children do come into contact

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with sick or dead poultry, they must wash their hands very thoroughly, especially before eating anything.

Can children play in the garden or in the park?

As mentioned, as far as is humanly possible to tell, there is no risk of getting infected with the "avian influenza" virus in this way. However, you should make sure that the children do not play on river banks that are obviously soiled with bird droppings. And the children should of course be told not to touch any dead birds.

Can pets be infected, for example if they catch or eat a bird?

Cats and dogs come into contact mainly with songbirds and pigeons. These birds are not known to be transmitters of avian influenza. And cats and dogs cannot get the infection by natural routes even from water birds. Although cats can be infected with high virus titres under laboratory conditions, transmission to humans is unknown to date.

Can we continue to eat poultry and eggs?

It is true that the virus can get into the eggs and muscle tissue of infected animals, the viruses are extremely heat sensitive. Therefore the risk of human infection from food is extremely low. Cooked foods and foods that have been heated (> 70°C) are free from infectious viruses. Attention: Freezing does not kill the virus!

By the way, for general hygiene reasons you should always wash your hands after touching raw meat.

What should I do if my children or I get the flu?

We must distinguish between the "avian influenza" virus and the annually recurrent influenza viruses that cause the so-called "real influenza" in our regions. And we must distinguish between "real influenza" and influenza-type infection! If you become ill, your doctor will quickly be able to tell whether you have an influenza-type infection (cold) or real influenza and treat you accordingly. It is extremely unlikely that you are suffering from "avian influenza", especially if you have not been in contact with poultry. But if you have had close contact with (sick or dead) poultry either in Austria or in any other country in which "avian influenza" has occurred, you should tell your doctor.

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Please bear the following distinction in mind:

Illness	Influenza-like infection	Virus influenza or real flu (influenza)
Incidence	Appears particularly often in the cold weather. Belongs to the most common infectious illnesses and there is still no treatment today for its cause. Mostly mild and of short duration.	Appears seasonally in winter caused by the particular variation of the influenza virus currently circulating.
Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General feeling of weakness • Sneezing, runny nose • Sore throat, hoarseness • Headache and aching limbs • Slightly raised temperature (up to approx. 38.5°C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden onset, rapid deterioration • Whole body affected by symptoms • High fever • Unable to keep warm, shivering • Aching muscles and limbs • Headache • Exhaustion • Cough • Complications - such as pneumonia, middle ear infection - are possible
Vaccination	No vaccination possible. Note: Influenza-type infections cannot be prevented by an influenza vaccination.	Annual prophylactic influenza vaccination possible. Particularly important for persons at risk: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all over 60s • residents of old people's and nursing homes • children, young people and adults whose health is particularly at risk due to existing illness, such as people with chronic lung and heart-lung disease, liver and kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, metabolic disorders, as well as immune deficiencies.

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		<p>Through vaccination catching the infection will be prevented or at least the severity will be substantially lowered. The protection afforded by vaccination starts no earlier than one week after the vaccination has taken place and becomes complete after two weeks has passed, providing protection for the whole winter. However, the vaccination does only provide protection for one winter as the surface of the virus mutates every year so that a completely new vaccination will be necessary the following year.</p>
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Please note: Although the influenza vaccination currently available will not protect you from possible infection with the H5N1 virus (agent that causes "avian influenza") or a potential new influenza virus, vaccination is still advisable, since it can help to prevent potential co-infections.

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For more information, please contact the **info hotline** of the Austrian Health and Food Safety Agency (AGES), phone no. **050 555 666**.

Disclaimer:

This paper does not claim to be all-comprehensive and is subject to change.



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More information is available at www.ages.at and at www.bmgf.gv.at, where you can also download the Austrian Pandemic Plan and the "Crisis Plan for Classical Fowl Pest and Newcastle Disease 2000".