

Avian Flu Guidelines

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As news of a possible avian flu pandemic this winter continues to flood the media, the uncertainty of when and how severe any outbreak may be is naturally stressful for us all. While avian flu is not currently transmissible between humans, it is prudent to consider the possibility of such an outbreak, and how to plan for any outbreak and guard against infection. Below are a few simple facts and guidelines to consider as you give thought to this important issue. (The following information is current as of November 16th):

Avian Flu or H5N1:

- Is a type A influenza virus
- Is known to produce the following symptoms: fever, sore throat, cough, muscle aches, possibly conjunctivitis and sometimes viral pneumonia and other serious complications
- Is currently contagious through direct contact with infected poultry / animals or their excretions
- Cannot be contracted from eating chicken or eggs which are thoroughly cooked to a temperature of 70 C or 158 F.

Seasonal Flu Shots:

- Do NOT provide protection against avian flu.
- Have been encouraged so that in the event of an outbreak, the number of persons contracting seasonal flu is reduced.

Tamiflu:

- The distribution of Tamiflu is currently centrally controlled on Taiwan, to ensure that it will be available to those who actually contract the virus in the event of an outbreak.
- There is *no scientific evidence* that Tamiflu reduces the complications of flu viruses. It has been shown to reduce the duration of the length of time a person is ill with a virus.
- It is possible that taking Tamiflu to prevent infection could lead to a strain of the virus that would be resistant to it.
- As with other medications, there are side effects associated with taking Tamiflu.

Concrete measures you can take to prepare for a possible outbreak, easily transmissible between humans:

Precautions:

- Wash your hands regularly, and encourage children to do so. During the SARS outbreak, the spread of other illnesses like enterovirus and chicken pox reduced significantly as a result of better hygiene.
- If you are sick, and especially if you have a fever, stay home.
- Cover your cough.

The following food handling guidelines are important safeguards to follow even aside from this potential outbreak:

- Wash egg shells before holding, cracking, or cooking eggs.
- After handling raw poultry or eggs, wash, with soap and water, your hands and all utensils and counter surfaces that have had direct contact with them.
- After raw poultry meat or eggs have been placed on a cutting board or platter, do not reuse the board without washing it thoroughly with soap and water first.

In the event that a quarantine is imposed or suggested as a way to contain the spread of the virus

consider stockpiling the following:

- Non-perishable food items to last from 4-10 weeks
- Essential toiletries
- Over-the-counter medications and medical supplies (masks are intended to be worn by those who are sick)
- Disinfectant soap for washing hands, bleach or other effective household cleansers

Trade offices:

- Register with your local trade office, so that in the event of an outbreak, or any other emergency, you can be contacted through their warden system.
- Be sure that your travel documentation, i.e. passports and visas are up-to-date; in the event of an outbreak, there *could* be delays or disruptions to these services for some offices.
- Have the contact details and/or website address for your trade office available to consult for possible travel advisories.

The Taiwanese government is investing resources to:

- Monitor migratory birds, chickens, ducks, geese and pigs
- Protect agricultural poultry and mammals from contracting the virus from migratory birds
- Stockpile Tamiflu and possibly manufacture anti-viral medications locally
- Purchase bulk vaccines from international manufacturers once available, and work toward domestic production in the future

Medical Care in Taiwan:

- Outpatient clinics and emergency rooms will respond to those with respiratory fever. If Avian Flu is identified, the patient could be transferred to another facility for in-patient care if needed.
- Certain hospitals will be designated for treatment of patients with Avian Flu. Hospital treatment would be suggested when breathing becomes very difficult, or when the ability to eat and drink are limited.

The following websites and organizations provide up-to-date and authoritative information about avian flu, and are the source of the above facts and guidelines:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.who.int>

<http://www.cdc.gov.tw/en>

<http://www.ait.org>

<http://www2.niaid.nih.gov/Newsroom/Releases/flucontracts.htm>

The Taiwan Center for Disease Control has a Chinese language 24 hour hot line for Avian Flu inquiries (0800-024-582). The best option is to have a Chinese speaking person make the initial call. Alternatively they will return calls in English if you leave your number.

In the event of an outbreak, The Center has contingency plans to continue operating, even from off-site if that becomes necessary. Community members could call or email us for information at our regular contact details and reach Center staff. Counseling services would continue to be available either at The Center or by telephone, as circumstances require.