

Avian influenza information

Information for GPs – please distribute to all medical and nursing staff

Key points

- The risk of avian influenza to human health remains low.
- Should a patient present with influenza-like symptoms **AND** who reports recent contact with unwell poultry or wild birds in Australia **OR** contact with unwell birds while recently overseas then consider the possibility of avian influenza.
- For such patients:
 - **Request** influenza polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and **note** the exposure history on the laboratory form.

Clinical presentation

- Avian influenza does not transmit easily to humans, and generally requires close contact with unwell birds (and in some cases, animals).
- Avian influenza presents with common influenza-like symptoms (e.g. cough, coryza, fever, myalgia). Patients may also report conjunctivitis. Symptoms will usually appear between 2 to 10 days following exposure.
- Consider avian influenza in patients with relevant exposure history **AND** symptoms, that is:
Patient is unwell with influenza-like illness **AND**:
 - Has had a close contact with unwell poultry or wild birds in Australia, **OR**
 - Is a returned traveller who had recent contact with birds overseas.

Testing

- Request standard influenza PCR testing. It is important to note on the request form avian influenza exposure as per the above criteria.
- If the result returns positive for Influenza A, contact your local public health unit on **1300 066 055**. This will facilitate further subtyping to determine if the infection is caused by avian influenza viruses.

Advice for patients

- The risk of transmission/infection to people exposed to avian influenza is low.
- Patients concerned about their own poultry should be directed to relevant information from NSW Department of Primary Industries (link below).

Background

- Avian influenza is circulating globally in animals. In NSW and Victoria, detections of different and unrelated avian influenza viruses on poultry farms have led to Emergency Animal Disease biosecurity control measures to contain the spread of these viruses.
- Human infections with avian influenza are rare and usually occur after close contact with infected birds.
- No sustained person-to-person transmission of avian influenza virus strains currently circulating worldwide has been reported. This situation is being actively monitored.

For further information

[NSW Health Avian Influenza Control Guidelines](#)

[NSW Department of Primary Industries: Avian Influenza in poultry and birds](#)

[RACGP Webinar recording: Avian Influenza H5N1, measles and dengue advice for primary care](#)



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