



Avian Flu Fact Sheet

You may have heard about avian flu, or bird flu. There are currently no cases of avian flu infecting birds or people in the United States.

What is it? Avian flu is a type of flu virus that is common in wild birds. They usually do not get sick from the virus. But they can easily pass the virus to birds that are being raised for food – such as chickens, ducks, and turkeys – and make some domestic poultry very sick.

Can people catch avian flu? Usually bird flu is not passed from birds to people. But since 1997, about 100 people have become sick with a serious type of bird flu. Half of them have died. Most of these infections have been in only four Asian countries among people who have had direct contact with birds that are being raised for food.

In a very few cases, experts think that bird flu may have been passed from human to human, not from a bird to a person. Because viruses can change quickly (mutate), experts are concerned that bird flu may one day be passed from person to person. There is no evidence that the avian flu virus is currently able to pass from one person to another person.

How will we know more? State departments of public health are closely monitoring wild and domestic birds and will know if avian flu appears in this country. Kaiser Permanente infectious disease physicians and specialists are working closely with state health departments and the Centers for Disease Control to monitor flu outbreaks. If anyone catches avian flu, Kaiser Permanente will know almost immediately. Kaiser Permanente physicians, staff and facilities are preparing strategic plans, should avian flu appear in the United States.

What can I do to prevent avian flu? There is no avian flu in the United States at this time. We cannot determine if it will become a problem soon, if at all. If you plan to travel to an area where the avian flu has been recently detected (Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand or Vietnam) do the following:

- Check with the Center for Disease Control for any travel warnings (www.cdc.gov/travel).
- Get a regular flu vaccination to protect yourself from the ordinary flu. If you become sick, it may decrease the chance of confusing ordinary flu with avian flu.
- Do not travel if you have a fever.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand rub if you are not near a sink. Wash your hands even if they don't look dirty.
- Avoid direct contact with poultry on farms and in marketplaces. Do not eat undercooked poultry. Avoid touching surfaces that may have been contaminated with bird feces or secretions.
- The CDC and Kaiser Permanente are not recommending anti-viral medication for protection from a flu virus. If you become ill with an avian flu virus, your KP physician will prescribe for you the appropriate and available anti-viral medicine.
- Tell your physician right away if you become ill during travel or within 10 days of returning from one of the above countries and feel like you have the flu (fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches).
- To avoid spreading the flu to others, cover your cough with a tissue or your elbow.