



# What to Tell Kids about Avian (Bird) Flu

Children may hear about bird flu at school or on TV and may have questions. As parents, caregivers and trusted grown-ups, adults may be in the best position to talk to children frankly about the situation while helping to calm their fears. This guide is designed to help you speak to children honestly without provoking undue fear or concern.

## HOW TO EXPLAIN BIRD FLU TO KIDS

- Bird flu is a sickness of poultry (chickens) and waterfowl (i.e., geese, ducks) and has not yet been found in birds in the United States.
- The bird flu rarely passes from birds to people, but it is spreading very quickly from birds to other birds at this time.
- Right now, only birds and people who have very close contact with birds can get bird flu.
- Scientists are unsure if you can catch the virus from other animals like cats.
- Close contact includes coming into contact with a sick bird's respiratory secretions (snot), saliva (spit) or feces (poop) or any surface that has been contaminated with these substances.

## WHY IS THERE SO MUCH TALK ABOUT BIRD FLU?

- If the flu virus mutates (changes) and begins easily infecting people then a pandemic may begin.
- A pandemic is a sickness that occurs all over the world.
- The flu that we can get every year is called seasonal flu and most kids just have to stay home from school for a few days to get better.
- A pandemic flu virus is a new virus that people haven't gotten before.
- If people haven't gotten sick before, then they don't have immunity. Immunity is a build up of resistance to sickness.
- Without immunity we can become very sick and that is why everyone is so concerned about bird flu. If bird flu starts passing from person to person, then it will be a hard disease for people's bodies to fight.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO STAY SAFE?

- In general, birds carry a lot of diseases besides bird flu, so it is always a good idea to wash your hands after being around birds. Don't rub your eyes or touch your nose or mouth while handling birds.
- If you have a pet bird, make sure to keep your pet and its food and water inside, away from a place where they could be exposed to any infected birds. Make sure to keep your bird cage clean and wash your hands after playing with or petting your bird.

- If the bird flu comes to the United States, here is when to find a grown-up:
  - If you are around a lot of birds.
  - If you step in bird poop, ask a grown-up to help you wash your shoes.
  - Don't try to help a bird that looks sick or touch a dead bird; find a grown-up.

## **HOW TO STAY HEALTHY ALL THE TIME**

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away after you use it.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth; germs often spread this way.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze or use the restroom and before eating. If you are not near soap and water, use hand sanitizer.
- Stay away as much as you can from people who are sick.
- If you get sick, stay home from school.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

To see what the State of Ohio is doing to prepare for a pandemic visit

<http://www.ohiopandemicflu.gov>. This inter-agency Web site includes many resources for Ohioans:

- Planning resources for Ohio's families, schools, businesses, communities, health care providers and local governments.
- Fact sheets, questions and answers, multi-media files, brochures and more.
- Quarterly planning newsletters – subscribe here.

For more information on national pandemic flu planning, visit the U.S. Health and Human Services Web site <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>. This Web site includes some of the following resources:

- Planning checklists.
- Family emergency health information sheet.
- Emergency contacts form.
- Strategies to mitigate pandemics.

The World Health Organization Web site <http://www.who.int/en/> provides updates on avian influenza around the world in several languages. Other resources include:

- Advice for travelers.
- Frequently asked questions.
- Industry guidelines.

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