



ADVICE TO STAFF AND STUDENTS ON BIRD FLU (AVIAN INFLUENZA) AND PANDEMIC FLU



The University of Reading has considered its response to the possibility of a flu pandemic (world wide flu epidemic), which might develop from an outbreak of avian (bird) flu. The University's planning draws upon the best available scientific and government advice and its experience in dealing with outbreaks of other infectious disease.

The risks to humans from **avian flu** are low, but it is possible an outbreak in birds could at some point develop into a **human flu pandemic** which would be much more serious. In saying this, it is important not to over-react and to realise that avian flu may not lead to pandemic flu.

This Safety Note provides information on the precautions you should take to help protect yourself from bird flu and on general good hygiene practices that will help to avoid the spread of other flu viruses (including both pandemic flu and other more common seasonal flu viruses).

BIRD FLU – THE FACTS

- Bird flu (or avian influenza) is a type of flu that mainly affects wild and domestic birds.
- It can spread rapidly between birds causing sickness and death, especially in poultry farms or live bird markets where birds are kept close together.
- Infected birds shed flu virus in their saliva, nasal fluids and droppings, spreading it to their feathers.
- A serious form of bird flu (caused by the H5N1 virus) has affected poultry (particularly chickens and ducks and some wild birds) in parts of Asia and Europe (see: www.who.int for list of affected areas).
- In the recent past, the H5N1 virus has spread to humans and caused serious illness in a small number of local people who have had close contact with infected birds. About half of these people have died. No human cases have occurred in the UK.
- So far, there is no confirmed evidence of this virus spreading from one person to another.
- Even if you come into close contact with infected birds, dead or alive, the risk of catching bird flu remains extremely low.
- There are currently no restrictions on travelling to affected areas.
- Travellers should be aware of the risk and follow the advice given in this Safety Note.

IF YOU ARE TRAVELLING TO AN AFFECTED AREA

The risk of avian flu to staff or students visiting countries affected by avian flu is believed to be very low. There is no reason not to travel to these countries. But all those visiting or living in countries affected by avian flu should follow sensible precautions.

If you are visiting countries with reported outbreaks of H5N1 bird flu among poultry, you should observe the following measures:

Before travel

Check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel Advice web site for any travel restrictions.

During the visit

- Do not visit bird or poultry farms or markets.
- Avoid close contact with live or dead poultry.
- Do not eat raw or poorly-cooked poultry.
- Do not eat raw or poorly-cooked poultry products, including blood.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

If you have been in contact with live or dead poultry

If you have been in contact with live or dead poultry in an affected country be aware of the symptoms of bird flu in humans. They are similar to ordinary flu symptoms and can appear suddenly. They may include:

- ❖ a fever (temperature of 38°C or more)
- ❖ cough
- ❖ shortness of breath
- ❖ headache
- ❖ sore throat
- ❖ sore eyes
- ❖ muscle aches.

Advice for staff members who develop flu-like symptoms whilst abroad

If you are a staff member and have these symptoms whilst abroad, and if you have been in close contact with live or dead poultry, you should seek medical advice locally on whether or not to return to the UK or to the University. You may also phone the University's Occupational Health Service on +44 118 3227629 or 3228415. You must not return to the University until you have discussed your symptoms with Occupational Health.

Advice for students who develop flu-like symptoms whilst abroad

If you are a University of Reading student and have these symptoms whilst abroad, and if you have been in close contact with live or dead poultry, you should seek medical advice locally on whether or not to return to the UK or to the University. If you are registered with the University Medical Practice, you may also phone them on +44 118 987 4551. You must not return to the University until you have sought medical advice from the University Medical Practice or other doctor, either in the UK or overseas.

For further travel advice consult the [National Travel Health Network Centre \(NaTHNaC\) www.nathnac.org](http://www.nathnac.org) and the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

IF YOU ARE RETURNING FROM AN AFFECTED AREA

If you develop the above symptoms within seven days of leaving an affected country and you had close contact with live or dead poultry, it is very important that you:

- Seek immediate medical attention.
- Contact your doctor (GP or University Medical Practice) or telephone NHS Direct on 0845 4647, stating your symptoms and recent travel history.
- Follow the advice that they give you.
- If you are a member of staff, do not visit the University, but contact the University Occupational Health Service and seek advice on whether or not you should report for work. Then contact your manager/supervisor to advise them of the situation.

- If you are a student, contact a close friend or tutor (preferably by telephone), informing them that you are ill and that it is possible that you may have avian 'flu. Stay in your room and do not mix with other students until a doctor has assessed your condition.

GOOD HYGIENE PRACTICES

You can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading any form of 'flu by:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, using a tissue where possible.
- Using tissues only once when coughing or sneezing and disposing of them promptly and carefully in a waste bin (preferably bagged).
- Washing your hands frequently with soap and water to reduce the spread of the virus from your hands to your face, or to other people.
- Avoiding touching surfaces (such as door handles) and then the face.
- Avoiding non-essential travel and large crowds whenever possible.
- Cleaning hard surfaces (e.g., kitchen worktops, door handles) frequently, using a normal cleaning product.
- Making sure children follow this advice.

Treatment

Most people with the flu need no special treatment. Influenza is caused by a virus so antibiotics do not help unless there is a complication. Occasionally a special 'antiviral' medicine will be given.

It is best to stay at home while feeling ill with influenza as this also reduces the chance of spreading the infection to others. You should rest and drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. You can take aspirin, ibuprofen or paracetamol to relieve the symptoms (following the instructions) but aspirin must NOT be given to children.

Vaccination against bird flu or pandemic flu

Currently available (seasonal) 'flu vaccines will not protect humans against disease caused by the avian H5N1 strain which is affecting the bird population in some countries. Vaccine manufacturers and institutions are working to develop and produce bird 'flu vaccines that may be suitable for use against a new pandemic 'flu strain derived from H5N1. However success will depend on how much the pandemic strain has mutated from the original H5N1 virus strain used to create the vaccine. If the virus changes substantially, a new vaccine would have to be developed. Work on creating such a vaccine could only begin once the new strain had been identified.

WILD BIRDS ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Wild birds live on the University campuses, in particular in the vicinity of the Whiteknights lake and on University farmland. Anyone finding 3 or more dead waterfowl (swans, geese and ducks) or a group of 5 or more dead birds of other species on the University campus should telephone the **University of Reading Security Services on Tel. 0118 378 6300.**

Government advice is not to touch any dead birds. If you do accidentally touch a dead bird, wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible. Avoid touching your face and do not eat until you have washed your hands. Clean any soiling on clothing with soap and water. More information is available on the Defra web site at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/>

FUTURE INFORMATION ON BIRD OR PANDEMIC FLU

The University is making sure that we have adequate channels of communication available to inform the whole University community about avian 'flu. We are also ensuring that our business continuity plan is fit for purpose.

As and when the situation changes, further information about bird flu and pandemic flu, and the University's response to any local outbreaks, will be published on the Health and Safety Services web site. Other communication methods will include the University Bulletin, the Student's Union and the University of Reading Student web site, School, departmental and Halls noticeboards, and the Health and Safety Services newsletter, *Safety Matters*.

The information in this Safety Note is based on the following sources of government advice:

- NHS leaflet on Bird Flu at <http://www.fmd.rdg.ac.uk/safety/documents/Birdfluleaflet.pdf>
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office Avian and Pandemic Flu Factsheet
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1115137377255>
- Health Protection Agency advice on bird flu at www.hpa.org.uk
- Food Standards Agency Bird Flu update at <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2005/dec/avianflu>