



Association Internationale de la Savonnerie, de la Détergence et des Produits d'Entretien
International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance Products

Frequently-Asked Questions (FAQ) on Avian Influenza

Avian Influenza (AI) is spreading across Europe and raising questions about cleaning, hygiene and disinfection recommendations for food producers and processors as well as for institutions where people work, stay or spend their free time. The Industrial & Institutional (I&I) sector of A.I.S.E. (the International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance Products) has the pre-eminent expertise to address the concerns of these organisations.

In this context, a series of questions and answers has been prepared to give general guidance.

Further information on detailed procedures and products to be applied can be obtained from I&I member companies of A.I.S.E. national associations. Contact details for the national associations can be found on the A.I.S.E. website (www.aise-net.org) under:

[About AISE > Our members \(choose a country\) > Go.](#)

The soaps, detergents and maintenance products industry, represented by A.I.S.E., has a unique role to play in combating avian influenza:

- Disinfectants are a vital tool in the control of an outbreak of AI, through the decontamination of agricultural equipment, transport and cages – a crucial step in preventing the spread of the infection to other farms.*
- High standards of personal hygiene and taking disinfection measures can help to prevent the transmission of the virus – hand-washing is one example of a simple but effective barrier, and is especially important with regard to preparing, handling and serving food. Washing clothes at temperatures higher than 70°C will kill the virus.*
- Food preparation surfaces should be kept clean, particularly where they have been in contact with raw poultry. Such preventative measures will help to guard against potential transmission to humans via this route.*
- Veterinary and human healthcare institutions should take extra precautions and ensure that their premises are thoroughly clean. This step becomes increasingly important when dealing with humans infected by the virus – particularly in order to guard against potential human-to-human transmission.*

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What is Avian Influenza?

Avian Influenza, also known as bird 'flu, is a contagious, highly pathogenic viral infection of birds. It is caused by a virus from the orthomyxoviridae family and is classified as a 'type A' influenza.^[1] The virus is excreted from infected birds in faeces and nasal or ocular secretions and spreads easily from bird to bird. The virus has also been isolated from feed, water and soil as a result of cross-contamination. Airborne transmission is also a possibility.^[2]

The H5N1 variant of the virus, currently endemic to Asia and parts of Europe, is especially virulent and has proved to be highly contagious and invariably fatal - in flocks where infection is seen, the death rate can be up to 100%.

The Avian Influenza agent is an enveloped virus of RNA character. While sensitive to high temperatures (greater than 70°C), low and high pH, and drying, the virus can survive for extended periods in tissues and faeces from infected birds, especially in cold and humid environments. It can also survive in water.^[1] However, the virus can be inactivated easily with - for example - detergents and disinfectants, which destroy the fatty outer wall of the virus.^[2]

What is the risk to domestic poultry?

The Avian Influenza viruses can infect chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese and guinea fowl, as well as a wide variety of other birds. Migratory waterfowl have proved to be a natural carrier of the virus, and have the potential to spread the illness to domestic birds if they mingle with them. For H5N1 Avian Influenza, domestic ducks may possibly be resistant to the disease but can serve as a carrier for the virus, which can then be spread to other domestic birds.^[4]

Once the virus has been identified within a flock, the disease is rapidly lethal to many birds. The primary control measure is often culling of the entire flock, which can have a significant financial impact on farmers and poultry processors.

What are the concerns for human health?

The virus normally infects only birds, but on rare occasions it crosses the species barrier to infect animals (such as pigs and cats) and humans. The H5N1 variant is of particular concern for human health, and poses two main risks. The first is the risk of direct infection when the virus passes from poultry to humans, causing potentially

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fatal illness. The mortality rate is high (approximately 50%) in cases of human infection. The second risk, of even greater concern, is the spread from human to human. Until early 2006, there was no evidence that the H5N1 virus could cause an outbreak by spreading between people. Nevertheless, scientists fear that the virus may mutate into a form that is highly infectious between humans. This could lead to a global outbreak (pandemic).

What is the human infection risk?

In the majority of cases where Avian Influenza has infected humans, the people involved have lived or worked on or near poultry farms. For humans, the current risk of catching Avian Influenza is from being in close contact with live birds that have the disease. Workers with poultry should therefore use adequate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). The risk is clearly less where there is no direct exposure or contact. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Avian Influenza is not transmitted through cooked food, and so far there is no evidence that anyone has become infected through handling poultry meat or eating well-cooked poultry or eggs. However, everyone should be aware of the risk of cross-contamination and of the hygiene, disinfection and cleaning practices that are necessary to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

How can the spread of the virus be minimised?

Controlling the threat of Avian Influenza means ensuring the virus does not spread, and the principal site for disease control is the farm. This includes following “stringent sanitary measures on the farm, including disinfection of contaminated farm equipment, transport vehicles, and cages” and implementing an adequate bio-security programme. Unfortunately, it may also mean “quarantining infected farms and destruction of infected or potentially exposed flocks and feed”.^[1]

Besides poultry growers and processors, everybody should follow good hygiene, disinfection and food safety practices to minimise the spread of the virus and risk of infection. Contact with wild and domestic birds and their droppings should be avoided.

What are good hygiene, disinfection and food safety practices?

Premises should be thoroughly cleaned, with particular attention to surfaces touched frequently by hands and to hand-washing itself. Good hygiene and disinfection measures related to the preparation, handling and serving of

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foods should continue to be observed. Again, particular attention should be given to hand hygiene, as well as the disinfection of surfaces that may come into contact with the hands or with food. This applies especially to surfaces that have been exposed to raw poultry products. Food should be cooked properly, to a temperature of 70°C or higher, as this will kill the virus. Healthcare institutions should follow extra measures when dealing with (suspected) Avian Influenza patients. In addition, carrying at laundry washing at temperatures of 70°C or higher will ensure that the virus is killed and cannot be passed on via clothing.

General recommendations

This document is intended to serve as an introduction to Avian Influenza. More detailed information on recommended practices and on products available for decontamination of surfaces, objects, hands and the environment, as well as information on food hygiene, is available from A.I.S.E. I&I expert companies. Their recommendations are drawn up in line with guidelines issued by major international disease control agencies and should be viewed as complementary to requirements issued by local health authorities. The products recommended should conform with local regulatory requirements in the various EU member states and be effective against Avian Influenza, and include recommended dosages to achieve disinfection.

What if an outbreak does occur?

In the case of a local outbreak, and in particular if it is confirmed that there is a risk that the virus will spread from person to person, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Health Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), and local health authorities are likely to issue further strict requirements and procedures to minimise the risk of human cross-infection in closed as well as public areas.

If a formal notice is issued, A.I.S.E. I&I expert companies will update the recommendations in line with local health authority instructions. Please contact the national association in your country in order to get in touch with our I&I expert companies.

In the context of crisis preparedness, I&I expert companies, in consultation with local authorities, will ensure that sufficient product stock and production capacity is available to deal with such a situation.

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Other useful sources of information on Avian Influenza

World Health Organisation (WHO)

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

http://www.efsa.eu.int/press_room/1193_en.html

European Commission

http://europa.eu.int/comm/press_room/presspacks/avianflu/index_en.html

Food and Agricultural organization of the United Nations (FAO)

http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/avian_safety.html

World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)

http://www.oie.int/eng/press/en_040121.htm

References

- ^[1] World Health Organization, Avian Influenza website: Fact sheets & updates
- ^[2] Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Animal Health cards, Avian Influenza website
- ^[3] Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Avian Influenza website Q&A
- ^[4] United States Department of Agriculture, Avian

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