

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Avian influenza is a viral infection that can affect all species of birds and can cause disease in humans on rare occasions.

Over the past five years there have been increasing reports of outbreaks of a severe strain of avian influenza (H5N1, highly pathogenic avian influenza) in birds in Asia which can cause occasional and limited influenza disease in humans. Transmission to humans only occurs through close contact with infected birds. There is no evidence of human-to-human transmission. This aspect is being watched closely by the World Health Organization. There have been no reports or evidence of disease by eating poultry products. The virus is easily killed by normal cooking procedures.

There is no Avian Influenza in poultry in Australia, and no poultry products from other countries are allowed into Australia.

All Australian poultry flocks and poultry meat are therefore free from Avian Influenza.

Australia has allocated \$133 million over five years to protect Australia from the entry of bird flu. The Department of Health and Ageing in Canberra has one of the World's largest stockpiles of antiviral vaccines, and has stocked up on protective masks, personal protective equipment, and is finalizing comprehensive response plans with the National Influenza Pandemic Action Committee in the event of its entry via people or wild migratory birds. An exercise to test the effectiveness of the plan is to be conducted in Australia in November, involving the State and Federal Health and Agriculture authorities and the poultry industry.

Industry and regulatory authorities have implemented intensive biosecurity, quarantine and surveillance programmes to ensure rapid detection and response to any viral incursion via wild birds, travellers through international borders, or illegal importation of poultry meat.

Measures to protect workers from avian influenza if in the event of an outbreak have been established, including vaccinations, protective equipment, training programmes, quarantine and border movement control.