

Avian Flu

Risks at the workplace



Different types of flu

Classic, seasonal human flu

There is a flu epidemic every year due to the human form of the Influenza virus of the Orthomyxovirus genus. A relatively high number of people are affected by this epidemic and the severity varies according to virus mutation, the speed and extent of it, and immunity levels in those affected. This flu can be prevented by the classic, seasonal flu vaccination..

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Avian flu (also called avian influenza or bird flu)

This is an animal disease mainly affecting wild or domestic birds, destroying chicken and turkey farms in particular through contamination with other wild birds or animal species (pigs or mammals). However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported specific cases whereby the avian flu virus has been transmitted to humans through the respiratory secretions of infected animals, their faeces or dirty feathers and dust. Only people with close, prolonged and repeated contact with infected animals are exposed to contamination by the avian virus A (H5N1). To date, those who have contracted the virus live in Asia and the Middle East and the illness cannot be transmitted from person to person (no inter-human contamination). Only cases affecting animals have been recorded in Europe.

Pandemic flu (also called pandemic influenza)

With the transmission of the avian flu virus H5N1 to humans in the circumstances described above and with the probability of transmission to a person with the classic human seasonal flu virus, a mutation is possible through the exchange of genetic material between these two viruses.

We will then be faced with a virus which can adapt to humans, presenting a high risk of infection and that none of us will be immune to.

According to the WHO classification (6 levels), the pandemic alert is currently at level 3 worldwide. There are still two unknown elements.

When will it happen? How?

The level of gravity is unknown as it depends on the "scale" of the mutation and medical progress to combat it.

Governments and companies have prepared action plans to combat this risk together with the national health authorities.

Risks at the workplace

If you are going on a trip to a country affected by avian flu, the general health recommendations for such trips are as follows:

- Regularly wash your hands with soap and water or with a disinfectant product (e.g. with a hydro-alcoholic liquid).
- Only consume thoroughly cooked food and bottled drinks with the lid on.
- Avoid any contact with living or dead poultry.
- Do not go to industrial or family-run farms or poultry and bird markets.
- Do not touch dead birds or bird waste.

- Avoid contact with surfaces which appear to be covered with bird droppings or animal faeces.
- It is also recommended not to eat poultry or egg products which are not properly cooked.
- It is preferable to use chicken which is ready to cook (cleaned and plucked).
- It is vital to comply with the recommendations issued by the local health authorities.

You can obtain relevant information from consular departments or from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

If you have just come back from a country affected by avian flu

If you were in contact with people with flu or with living or dead (uncooked) poultry during your trip. If, within 10 days of returning home, you feel the onset of flu symptoms (fever, muscle and joint pain, breathing difficulties, coughing,...etc.) It is vital to call or visit a doctor immediately specifying that you have recently returned from a country affected by avian flu.

If these symptoms occur during your return flight, immediately inform a crew member to ensure that the appropriate medical care is awaiting you upon arrival.

General rules of hygiene

Disinfecting your hands

- Wash your hands (drinking water + hydro-alcoholic solution or antiseptic soap + disposable paper towel) after contact with an ill person or someone thought to be ill, before meals, during breaks, at the end of the working day.
- In case of a wound: wash and lather with an antiseptic product, rinse, disinfect and apply a waterproof plaster.
- In case of projection into the eyes: rinse thoroughly.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke at your workplace.

Blowing your nose, sneezing, expectoration, coughing

As the flu virus is transmitted through the air and particularly by respiratory droplets, it is vital to comply with the basic rules of respiratory hygiene, i.e.:

- Cover your mouth whenever you cough, then wash your hands.
- Cover your nose when you sneeze, then wash your hands.
- Blow your nose with disposable paper tissues, dispose of them in a waste-bin with a lid, then wash your hands.
- Spit into a disposable paper tissue only, dispose of it in a waste-bin with a lid, then wash your hands.

How to wash your hands properly

Washing your hands frequently and carefully is the most effective way of preventing the spread of gastroenteritis, flu and other viral or bacterial infections.

Being responsible

- Wet your hands and squeeze some liquid soap into your palm
- Lather for at least 30 seconds, as follows:



Rub your palms together



Rub the right palm over the back of the left hand and vice versa



Rub your palms together spreading and interlinking the fingers



Clasp the fingers together and rub the back of the fingers against the palm of the other hand



Rub the right thumb in a circular motion in the closed palm of the left hand and vice versa



In a circular movement, rub the tips of the bent fingers on the palm of the left hand and vice versa

- Rinse the hands thoroughly up towards the wrists
- Dry the hands and wrists thoroughly with a disposable towel and use the towel to turn off the tap so that you don't touch it with your hand.

When should you wash your hands?

- After coughing, sneezing, before and after meals, after going to the toilet.
- After using public transport, on arriving at work, on arriving home.