



Avian Influenza in the Fraser Valley – Important Health Information for Workers Involved in Low-Exposure Poultry Depopulation Activities

I. Should workers involved in depopulation of poultry during avian influenza outbreaks be concerned?

Recommendations provided on the flipside of this letter are for workers who are at low risk of exposure to avian influenza. This includes workers, such as truckers or disposal workers, who are involved indirectly with the culling process of known infected birds but who will not have direct or close contact with infected poultry or products. It also includes workers involved in the regular slaughter or other processing of non-infected birds (test negative flocks) while outbreaks of avian influenza are ongoing in the Fraser Valley.

Workers who are at higher risk of exposure because they are directly handling or sharing the same confined airspace as known avian influenza infected birds, bird products or manure have been given specific information on how to protect themselves. These separate recommendations should be consulted and strictly followed. **If you belong in the category** of higher-exposure poultry worker or farmer, **please consult your supervisor or local health unit** for these detailed recommendations for you.

II. What is avian influenza?

Influenza ("flu") viruses that infect birds are called avian influenza viruses. These viruses are related to but different from human influenza viruses. Some avian influenza viruses can cause severe outbreaks that can spread quickly between flocks of chickens.

III. What is the cause of outbreaks in poultry in the Fraser Valley in 2004?

An avian influenza virus is currently causing poultry outbreaks in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. This virus belongs to the H7 subtype of avian influenza virus and is called H7N3. H7 subtypes of avian influenza have caused serious outbreaks in poultry before. In the Netherlands, an outbreak of H7N7 avian influenza virus led to the depopulation of 30 million birds in 2003.

IV. Can avian influenza viruses cause infections in humans?

Only a few avian influenza viruses have caused illness in people. This has been in people who had close contact with infected poultry, products or manure and likely occurred by direct contamination of the eyes, nose or mouth or by contaminated hands, or possibly by breathing in virus released into the air of a confined space. H5 avian influenza viruses have caused poultry outbreaks in Asia and people there have died from severe illness as a result of close contact with H5 infected birds. Most people who got avian influenza due to H7 in the Netherlands in 2003 had mild illness of red eyes, but one person also died. The H7 strain of avian influenza in the Fraser Valley has also caused mild illness in people who have had close contact with infected birds. In addition to red eyes, some people exposed to infected poultry in BC have also reported symptoms such as cough, runny nose, sore throat, fever and muscle or joint aches. There are many causes of these sorts of symptoms and most have not had avian influenza.

V. Why is it so important to prevent avian influenza infections in people?

It is very important to prevent infections due to avian influenza in people, even if it seems like it is a mild illness. The reason for this is because influenza viruses are very changeable. When these changes occur, there is a risk that outbreaks of more serious illness in people could get started and could spread worldwide. People working with infected poultry could be the link between outbreaks in chickens and outbreaks in people so it is important that their health and safety is closely monitored and protected.

VI. How can avian influenza outbreaks be stopped?

The most important way to stop avian influenza outbreaks from spreading is to depopulate (or kill) infected and non-infected poultry in the surrounding area so that the virus has nowhere to go and eventually fades out. Depopulation of poultry to stop outbreaks in the Fraser Valley will be done in one of two ways: (1) special culling of infected poultry and (2) regular slaughter or rendering of non-infected (test negative flocks) poultry. Regular slaughter of non-infected birds will only be allowed when the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has randomly tested select birds from each flock within 48 hours before their being loaded for slaughter (according to a special protocol) and these poultry have tested negative for avian influenza. Per standard procedure, an inspector at the site must also confirm that the poultry are still healthy when they arrive for slaughter.



Avian Influenza in the Fraser Valley – Workplace Recommendations for Workers Involved in Low-Exposure Poultry Depopulation Activities

- 1. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 30 seconds. Avoid touching your face – especially eyes, nose or mouth - with your hands.**
Always wash your hands after handling raw poultry. If you wear gloves during your work, wash your hands immediately after removing the gloves.
- 2. Carefully follow the standard personal protective measures recommended by your workplace.**
If you are uncertain about what these are or how to follow them, discuss with your supervisor or employer or with the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) at 604-267-3100 or toll-free at 1-888-621-SAFE. Further guidance material is available from WCB through their website at: www.worksafebc.com
- 3. If you are transporting poultry, strictly follow recommendations of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).**
To limit spread of the virus between farms, shoes worn around barns with infected poultry, manure or products should be covered with shoe covers which are not to be worn off that immediate site and must be disposed of according to CFIA protocol. Shoes should undergo thorough cleaning and disinfection before leaving the site. If you are uncertain about other specific recommendations or protective measures, discuss with an inspector of the CFIA and/or visit their website at www.inspection.gc.ca.
- 4. Report any unusual incidents to your supervisor or first-aid attendant.**
This includes any leaks, accidents or other concerning incidents that may occur during the course of your work. Do not attempt to handle these incidents on your own. Call for immediate assistance. If your supervisor or first-aid attendant assesses that there may be a risk related to avian influenza, they should report this immediately to the local health unit and the CFIA.
- 5. While outbreaks of avian influenza are going on in the Fraser Valley, watch for red, itchy or gluey eyes or flu-like symptoms (cough, runny nose, sore throat, feverishness or aches) starting within one week of your last workplace exposure to raw poultry or poultry products.**
If you develop these symptoms, notify your local health unit and your supervisor or first-aid attendant immediately. Seek medical care if necessary. Testing for avian influenza and further follow-up may be recommended by the local health unit. There are many causes of red eyes and flu-like symptoms. Even though you may be unlikely to have avian influenza, reporting these symptoms is an added precaution until the avian influenza outbreak in poultry is over.
- 6. While outbreaks of avian influenza are going on in the Fraser Valley, persons who have close workplace contact with raw poultry can receive this year's influenza vaccine free.**
This is to prevent infection with human influenza viruses that are still known to be circulating in BC as of April 2004. This will not prevent avian influenza. It will help prevent infection at the same time with human and avian influenza viruses which can possibly create new strains that would have the potential to result in outbreaks in humans. This vaccine is available to you free of charge during this poultry outbreak. To find out how to obtain the vaccine, phone public health at 1-866-854-5255.