

What you should know about the Bird Flu...



What is the chance of a person getting bird flu?

Bird flu in humans is rare at this time. So far there has only been one probable case of human-to-human transmission.

Could bird flu become a bigger problem and cause a flu pandemic?

Possibly. The transmission of bird flu from chicken to chicken and among other birds has been very widespread. Bird flu has not changed genetically to allow it to spread easily from one person to another. And it's hard for people to get bird flu even from birds.

What is being done to prevent a bird flu pandemic?

The World Health Organization (WHO) and some countries currently affected by the bird flu are hoping to stop the bird flu in its tracks through a combination of culling birds that are sick with avian influenza, vaccination of healthy birds, and perhaps rapid deployment of antiviral drugs if a localized outbreak of bird flu occurs among people. Measures like isolation and quarantine, which were helpful in stopping the SARS epidemic, would probably be used to contain a bird flu outbreak in people as well.

Should people ask their physicians for a Tamiflu prescription so they can "stockpile" it in their homes?

NO. Bird flu in humans is rare at this time. Taking an antiviral drug for a fever could delay the diagnosis of another more common and potentially serious infectious disease; Tamiflu might also be wasted treating less serious illnesses. And, the indiscriminate use of Tamiflu might promote resistance to the drug in flu viruses. Also, Tamiflu is in short supply—we may need it to treat seniors and other high-risk persons who get the regular flu this year.

In the early phases of a pandemic, simple infection control measures like covering your mouth when you cough, washing your hands frequently, and staying home when you are sick with a flu-like illness may play a far greater role. In the long run, an effective vaccine would be the best weapon against a bird flu pandemic.

Can you get bird flu from eating chicken?

No -- if the meat is fully cooked. Cooking kills flu viruses in poultry, meat and eggs.

How do you catch bird flu?

People have caught bird flu from handling infected poultry and from surfaces contaminated with poultry faeces. There are a few suspected cases of human-to-human bird flu transmission. These happened only after prolonged face-to-face contact.