



Safe handling,  
processing &  
consumption  
of poultry  
meat and eggs  
during bird flu  
outbreak



*Inspiring Trust, Assuring Safe & Nutritious Food*

Avian influenza, or “bird flu” or “avian flu” is an infection caused by avian influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chicken and ducks, very sick and kill them.

Avian influenza (AI), as per World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), is defined as an infection of poultry caused by any influenza A virus of the H5 or H7 subtypes or by any influenza A virus with an intravenous pathogenicity index (IVPI) greater than 1.2. These viruses are divided into high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses and low pathogenicity avian influenza viruses.

Most strains of avian influenza virus are mainly found in the respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts of infected birds, and not in meat. However, highly pathogenic viruses, such as the H5N1 strain, spread to virtually all parts of an infected bird, including meat. Highly pathogenic avian influenza virus can be found inside and on the surface of eggs laid by infected birds. Although sick birds will normally stop producing eggs, eggs laid in the early phase of the disease could contain viruses in the egg-white and yolk as well as on the surface of the shell. Proper cooking inactivates the virus present inside the meat and eggs. **Poultry meat and eggs from areas with outbreaks in poultry should not be consumed raw or partially cooked. However, to date, no evidence indicates that anyone has become infected following the consumption of properly cooked poultry or poultry products, even if these foods were contaminated with the avian influenza virus.**

#### PRECAUTIONS TO BE TAKEN AT RETAIL MEAT SHOPS

- Do not bring any live or slaughtered/dead poultry birds at retail shop from the avian influenza outbreak areas and do not allow it to enter in the food chain.
- During avian influenza outbreak, people who handle live poultry should take special precautions. They should wear PPE, gloves and masks while handling birds.
- People handling raw meat should wear gloves, masks and wash their hands properly with water and soap, especially before and after handling the raw poultry and eggs. Also avoid contact with bird droppings.
- Wash and disinfect all surfaces and utensils that have been in contact with the raw meat.
- Clean and sanitize the knives and cutting boards between cutting/slaughtering the two birds.

- All the waste generated from the retail poultry shop must be properly disposed.

### PRECAUTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY CONSUMERS

- Do not purchase eggs/ poultry meat sourced from the avian influenza infected areas.
- One should avoid going to open markets that sell poultry in the affected area as they are the focal point of the spread.
- People who work closely with live infected poultry are at high risk of getting the infection.
- The cases of virus spread in humans have also been linked to slaughter of infected birds as well as handling of dead birds, before cooking.
- Human to human transmission of the avian influenza virus is very rare unless one works in proximity with the infected birds.
- The Food and Agriculture Organisation recommends that one of the best ways to minimize the risk of infection is by keeping infected birds away from the food chain at all levels - that is to ensure procurement of products from genuine, trusted sources.
- The World Health Organization, in its past advisory also suggested people to practice safe hygienic practices before procuring or cooking any produce, and make sure to source ingredients from trusted places.

### PRECAUTIONS DURING HANDLING AND COOKING OF POULTRY MEAT

- The WHO states that it is safe to consume poultry meat and eggs. **According to the WHO official site, there is no epidemiological data which suggests that the disease can be transmitted to humans through cooked food** (even if the bird was contaminated with the virus before cooking).
- Poultry and poultry products can be prepared and consumed as usual, with no fear of acquiring infection with the avian flu virus if following precautions are taken.
- Do not wash the chicken in the running water as it may cause water splashing and spread of droplets contaminating the surroundings.
- Follow good hygienic practices while handling and preparation of poultry meat products
- Use gloves and masks during the handling and preparation of raw poultry/poultry products
- After handling raw poultry meat, wash hands and other exposed parts with soap and water.
- Do not use the same chopping board or the same knife that is used for cutting raw poultry meat for any other food item before sanitizing it or thoroughly washing it with soap/detergent.

- The virus is destroyed at a higher temperature (D values ranging from 0.28 to 0.5 s at 70 °C or 0.041 to 0.073 s at 73.9 °C). Proper cooking at temperatures at 74 °C or above in all parts of the product will inactivate the virus (USDA).
- Do not place cooked meat back on the same plate or surface, as prior to cooking. Use different utensils for raw and cooked products. Raw poultry and poultry products should never be allowed to come in contact with cooked food items or the food items that are eaten raw.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces in contact with the raw poultry meat/products.
- Wash and disinfect all surfaces and utensils that have been in contact with the raw meat.
- Do not handle both raw and cooked foods without washing your hands in between.
- Wash hands with good quality soap and water for 20-30 seconds before and after cooking.

### PRECAUTIONS DURING HANDLING AND COOKING OF TABLE EGGS

- The avian flu virus is destroyed by drying and exposure to sunlight within few hours. As it is likely that the eggs that reach the consumer were laid several hours ago, even if the droppings on eggs are carrying the avian flu virus, the likelihood of infection is low.
- However, in the event of an outbreak of avian influenza, droppings on eggs are to be considered infective and all the hygienic handling and safety precautions should be taken.
- Wear gloves and mask while handling the raw eggs.
- Do not wash the eggs in the running water as it may cause water splashing and spread of droplets contaminating the surroundings. To do away with the dirt on the surface of eggs clean them by dipping in clean portable water or wipe with clean wet tissue or cloth.
- While opening the raw eggs, precaution is to be taken that the raw egg contents do not spill in the surrounding areas and do not contaminate the cooked food or food items that are to be eaten raw. Raw eggs and egg products should never be allowed to come in contact with cooked food items or the food items that are eaten raw.
- Proper cooking at temperatures at or above 74°C in all parts of the product will inactivate the virus (USDA).
- While cooking an egg, ensure that the yellow yolk becomes firm and avoid eating runny eggs during the course of the outbreak.
- Consumers need to be sure that all parts of the poultry are fully cooked and that eggs, too, are properly cooked (no “runny” yolks).

- Do not use raw or soft-boiled eggs in food preparations that will not be heat treated or cooked.
- Use different utensils for raw and cooked products.
- Wash and disinfect all surfaces and utensils that have been in contact with the raw egg/raw egg products.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces coming in contact with the raw egg/raw egg products
- Wash hands with good quality soap and water for 20-30 seconds before and after cooking.

#### LIST OF DO's AND DON'Ts

1. Do not eat half-boiled eggs
2. Do not eat undercooked chicken
3. Avoid direct contact with birds in the infected areas
4. Avoid touching dead birds with bare hands
5. Do not keep raw meat in open
6. No direct contact with raw meat
7. Use a mask and gloves at the time of handling raw chicken
8. Wash hands frequently
9. Maintain the cleanliness of surroundings.
10. Eat chicken, eggs and their products after cooking.

**Properly prepared and cooked poultry meat  
and eggs are safe to eat!!**