

Avian Flu Laboratory Workers

Avian flu is a viral disease and it can be very contagious and even deadly in poultry (e.g., chickens, turkeys, ducks). Of great concern are the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses (e.g., H5N1, H7N9) that have killed millions of birds and infected humans in other countries. If avian flu viruses are detected in the U.S., take appropriate precautions.

Avian Flu Symptoms in Humans

Range from fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches to nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, eye infections, difficulty breathing, pneumonia and severe respiratory disease. Symptoms may depend on which virus strain caused the infection but are often similar to those of human seasonal influenza.

Precautions for Lab Workers

Strains of HPAI may be classified as select agents, requiring working under Biosafety Level (BSL) 3 with enhancements (see www.cdc.gov/biosafety/publications/bmbl5). These enhancements include BSL-3 procedures plus the following:

- controlled access, double-door entry with change room and shower;
- use of showers by personnel before exiting;
- decontamination of all wastes; and
- use of at least an N95 respirator.

Key Considerations

- Virus culture studies on respiratory specimens from patients suspected of having HPAI infections should NOT be attempted except under stringent BSL-3 conditions with enhancements.
- If a clinical laboratory does not have appropriate facilities (BSL-3 laboratories with enhancements), virus isolations should not be ordered for patients suspected of having HPAI infection unless the specimen can be safely sent to a lab with proper controls.
- Molecular assays (e.g., RT-PCR) or commercial antigen detection testing can be conducted on clinical specimens from suspected HPAI cases using standard BSL-2 work practices.

Additional Guidance

- Get the seasonal flu vaccine.
- If you develop flu-like symptoms, stay at home except to get medical attention.

For more information:



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