

Avian Influenza and Food Safety

Would you eat chicken during a bird flu epidemic? Since the Avian influenza or "Bird Flu" virus was first identified and described, there has been concern among consumers about avian influenza and food safety, and the belief that the virus could be transmitted to humans from eating the meat of infected chickens and birds. Is this a cause for concern for the average American?

Before addressing this question, it's important to understand how the [Avian influenza](#) virus is spread. The avian influenza virus is spread by direct contact between birds and through contact with the feces and secretions of birds infected with the virus. There is also the potential for airborne transmission between birds living in close quarters, such as a poultry house. Humans can contract the virus from being in close contact with the feces and secretions from infected birds. Can the virus be transmitted through the oral intake of eggs and poultry from an infected bird? If this is the case, this would present an enormous avian influenza food safety issue for countries affected by the virus.

With safeguards put into place to screen for infected birds, it's highly unlikely an infected bird or egg would enter the food chain to be a threat to consumers. Plus, the literature shows that the avian influenza virus is not transmissible through properly cooked poultry and eggs. What avian influenza food safety precautions should you take in order to protect yourself in the event of an epidemic? The literature suggests you should take the same precautions with eggs and poultry as you would to safeguard yourself against food poisoning. These avian influenza food safety measures would include:

1. Washing all utensils and cutting boards that come into contact with poultry or eggs thoroughly with soap and water. For additional protection, you can follow up with a disinfecting agent.
2. Wash your hands thoroughly with warm soap and water after handling poultry or eggs.
3. Cook poultry and eggs to a temperature of at least 165 degrees before serving.
4. If you need to use uncooked eggs in a recipe, be sure to use pasteurized egg products.

These common sense food safety measures can not only protect you against the threat of avian flu, but also reduce your risk of food poisoning of all types.

It's encouraging to know by using proper avian influenza food safety measures, the risk of transmission of the avian influenza virus through poultry and egg consumption is extremely low. To date, no evidence of such transmission has occurred and is highly unlikely to occur when poultry and eggs are properly cooked.

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