

3 things you need to know about bird flu

Sun, 02/23/2025 - 23:01

|
SPHTM Communications sphcomm@tulane.edu

[View PDF](#)



As bird flu spreads, what do people need to know? (Getty Images)

The headlines are awash with reporting on the spread of bird flu, all the while egg prices in the grocery store are soaring.

So, what does the average person need to know about bird flu? How serious is the problem? And what can we do to protect ourselves?

Let's break down the basics with the help of expert [Dr. Sarah R. Michaels](#), who teaches at Tulane University's [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) and has a PhD in [Tropical Medicine](#).

Dr. Michaels has engaged in public health practice as a medical entomologist at the City of New Orleans and an infectious disease epidemiologist at the Louisiana Office of Public Health.

Seasonal flu cases are on the rise

Independent of bird flu infections, a secondary wave of influenza infections is spreading through the U.S. According to the CDC, the surge is the highest seen in the last 15 years.

Activity is at very high levels in the South including Louisiana, and many of the cases are among children under age 4 and in school-age children and young adults 5 to 24 years.

Influenza is responsible for around 10 percent of all emergency room visits.

"It is not entirely clear what is driving this increase, but fewer kids are getting vaccinated against the flu than before Covid-19," Michaels says. "It's not too late for anyone to get a flu shot this season."

Bird flu is spread via contact with infected animals

This rise in human influenza infections is due to seasonal strains, but they are happening at the same time as an increase in avian influenza among chicken flocks and mammals including dairy cattle and cats.

There have been 70 confirmed avian influenza human cases in the U.S., four of which were detected through national flu surveillance. All but three of the 70 cases have been linked to exposure with infected animals.

“The single human case fatality was reported in Louisiana,” Michaels says. “That individual was exposed through contact with an infected backyard flock of chickens. There has been no evidence of human-to-human transmission of avian influenza virus.”

The Center for Disease Control currently describes avian flu risk as low. The CDC maintains a map with exposure information [here](#).

Cook your food well

In addition to taking precautions around sick or dead birds (less of a concern for the general population), eggs and meat should be cooked thoroughly before eating, and people should absolutely refrain from drinking raw milk.

“The screening of symptomatic herds and the national milk testing program have demonstrated that the spillover of H5N1 from migratory birds or waterfowl to cattle has happened more than once and will be difficult to contain,” Michaels says.

--

This week, Dr. Michaels will lead a discussion about bird flu, "Why are eggs so expensive? An update on Avian Influenza." Find out more about the seminar [here](#).