

## **Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health**

### **Avian influenza**

#### **Causative agent**

Avian Flu (H5N1) is one type of Influenza A. It is known previously to infect birds only, but 18 and 2 human cases were documented in Hong Kong in 1997 and 2003 respectively.

#### **Clinical features**

Avian Flu (H5N1) has similar clinical presentation as other influenza viruses. However, it is more likely to result in high fever, chest infection, respiratory failure, multi-organ failure, even death.

#### **Mode of transmission**

Avian Flu (H5N1) is transmitted from infected live birds to man. Transmission between humans is very inefficient.

#### **Management**

People with influenza should have adequate rest and sleep and drink plenty of fluid. Anti-fever medicine and cough syrup are useful to reduce symptoms. Unless there is bacterial infection, antibiotics should not be used. Patients should also observe personal hygiene and wash hands frequently to prevent spreading the virus from the hands which can get the virus from contact with the nose or mouth. Aspirin should not be used in children because it can induce Reye's Syndrome. For patients with lower resistance or when there are signs of deterioration, e.g. persistent high fever or shortness of breath, they should seek early medical advice.

Avian Flu H5N1 is generally more severe than an ordinary "flu", and many patients require hospital care. Some anti-viral drugs may be effective in treating the condition. However, drugs should be used carefully following doctor's instructions as they may cause adverse side effects.

## **Prevention**

The best protection against influenza is by building good body resistance. This can be achieved through a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate rest, reducing stress and no smoking. If you have a 'flu', better avoid crowded public places where the ventilation is not good.

Droppings of infected live birds and poultry may carry the Avian Flu virus. One should avoid touching live birds and poultry and their droppings. If you have been in contact with live birds and poultry, wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap and water immediately. If you keep live bird at home, avoid close contact with the pet and wash hands thoroughly with liquid soap each time after touching it or after cleaning its droppings. Schools and nurseries should take measures to prevent children from coming into contact with live birds. Poultry and eggs should be thoroughly cooked before eating. When traveling outside Hong Kong, avoid touching live birds and poultry. Travellers returning from endemic areas should consult doctors promptly if they have symptoms of influenza after the trip. Let the doctors know the travel history and wear a mask to prevent spread of the disease.

At all times: Observe good personal and environmental hygiene. Keep hands clean, wash hands frequently with liquid soap, especially before eating and touching nose, mouth and eyes. Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of the soiled tissues properly (into a bin with lid), then wash hands thoroughly.

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