

Health Advice on Prevention of Avian Flu for Media Workers

Introduction

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) is devoted to prevent outbreak of avian flu. As media reporters need to visit hospitals and avian flu affected areas, CHP has provided this health advice and guidance for their reference. In addition, all media organizations are encouraged to co-ordinate and adopt appropriate precautions to safeguard the health of every employee.

Background:

Causative agent

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

Clinical features

Avian Flu (H5N1) has similar clinical presentation as other influenza viruses, including fever, generalised muscle pain, cough and sore throat. However, it is more likely to result in high fever, diarrhea and severe chest infection, multi-organ failure and even death.

Mode of transmission

Avian Flu (H5N1) is largely transmitted from infected live birds to man. Transmission via environment cannot be ruled out. According to the most recent epidemiological and clinical evidence, transmission between humans is inefficient.

Prevention

Visit to hospitals and clinics

1. In hospitals and clinics (include private clinics, hospital clinics, General Outpatient Clinics, day care centres, specialist clinics, etc):
 - Wear surgical mask while visiting the hospital patient-care areas such as wards. It is not necessary to wear surgical masks in non-patient areas (e.g. offices).
 - Avoid unnecessary contact with the public facilities/ objects.
 - Follow the visitor registration policy so as to facilitate contact tracing if necessary.
 - Wash hands before and after removal of personal protective equipments (PPE).
 - Wash hands before leaving hospitals and clinics.

2. **During media interview**
 - During the interview, make sure the patient is wearing a mask.
 - Avoid direct patient contact.
 - Use appropriate PPE (e.g. masks, gowns, goggles) according to the guidance of the respective settings.
 - Used PPE should be treated as contaminated and should not be brought into non-clinical areas.
 - If special approval is granted to visit infected or suspected cases or enter high-risk areas (e.g. wards, triage

areas), you should check in advance with the in-charge staff the appropriate infection control precautions and use of appropriate PPE.

- Wash hands immediately and properly after the interview.
- Avoid shared use of interviewing equipment which can be easily contaminated with droplet e.g. microphone & audio recorder.
- Clean and disinfect the equipment after individual interview.
- The used equipments should be disinfected with appropriate disinfectant such as 70% alcohol for metallic or diluted household bleach (1 part of household bleach with 49 parts of water) for non-metallic surfaces, then wiped with water. Wash hands after cleansing.
- If any staff get respiratory tract infection or develop signs and symptoms of avian flu, including
 - Fever (38°C or above), cough and/or sore throat; and with
 - History of close contact with suspected or confirmed avian flu patients or
 - recent travel to areas with reports of avian flu in human or animals,seek medical consultation at once.

Leaving for or returning from avian flu affected areas

- **Before departure:** if running a temperature or having a sore-throat or cough, or feeling unwell, you are advised not to travel and to postpone your trip until recovery.
- Bring a thermometer for daily body temperature check if you are coming from an area with recent reports of avian flu in animal or human.
- Check body temperature daily throughout the trip.
- Wear a surgical mask, face shield or eye goggles and appropriate PPE during visit to high risk areas i.e. farms or markets with reports of avian flu.
- Use serving chopsticks and spoons at meal times. Do not share meal boxes or drinks.
- Whenever you feel unwell during your visit to these areas, especially if you run a fever,
 - You and your collaterals should put on a surgical mask immediately;
 - Seek medical consultation at once.
 - Re-arrange the itinerary and follow the quarantine/confinement measures as instructed by local health authority;
- **After returning home:** if you fall sick, you should put on a mask, seek medical attention immediately, and inform recent travel history.

Whether or not going out to work, all media workers should maintain good personal hygiene:

- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing and wash hands with soap and water afterwards.
- Keep hands clean and wash hands properly with liquid soap, and use hand dryer or disposable towel for drying hand.

When should we wash our hands?

- Before touching the eyes, nose and mouth
- Before eating or handling food

- After using the toilet
- When hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions, e.g. after coughing or sneezing
- After touching public installations or equipment, such as escalator handrails, elevator control panels or door knobs

Steps for good handwashing

1. Wet hands under running water.
2. Apply liquid soap and rub hands together to make a soapy lather.
3. Away from the running water, rub the front and back of hands. Massage all the finger tips properly including the thumb, the web of the fingers, around and under the nails. Do this for at least 10 seconds.
4. Rinse hands thoroughly under running water.
5. Dry hands thoroughly with either a clean cotton towel, a paper towel, or a hand dryer.
6. The cleaned hands should not touch the water tap directly again.
 - The tap may be turned off by using the towel wrapping the faucet;
 - or
 - after splashing water to clean the faucet.

Rub hands with a 70% alcohol solution to disinfect the hands when hand washing facilities are not available.

- Maintain good personal and environmental hygiene.
- Building up good body resistance through a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate rest, reducing stress, and not smoking.
- If you develop influenza-like symptoms such as fever, sore throat and cough, you should :
 - consult your doctor promptly;
 - wear a surgical mask; and take rest at home .

Points to note about wearing a mask:

- Wash hands before putting on a mask, before and after taking one off.
- Follow the instructions given by the supplier.

When wearing a surgical mask, ensure that:

- The mask fits snugly over the face.
- The coloured side of the mask faces outwards, with the metallic strip uppermost.
- The strings or elastic bands are positioned properly to keep the mask firmly in place.
- The mask covers the nose, mouth and chin.
- The metallic strip moulds to the bridge of the nose.
- Try not to touch the mask once it is secured on your face as frequent handling may reduce its protection. If you must do so, wash your hands before and after touching the mask.

- When taking off the mask, avoid touching the outside of the mask as this part may be covered with germs.
- After taking off the mask, fold the mask outwards (i.e. the outside of the mask facing inwards), then put the mask into a plastic or paper bag before putting it into a rubbish bin with a lid.
- A surgical mask should be discarded after use and under no circumstances should it be used for longer than a day. Replace the mask immediately if it is damaged or soiled.

Further information:

Travellers seeking health information may call the Hong Kong Department of Health's Travel Health Centre at 2961 8840 or 2150 7235, or visit the Department of Health's Hong Kong Traveller's Health Service website at <http://www.info.gov.hk/trhealth>.

For Hong Kong residents who encounter entry or exit difficulties on quarantine grounds while abroad, they can call Department of Health's Port Health 24-hour hotline (852) 8103 1717.

You may also browse the webpages of Centre for Health Protection <http://www.chp.gov.hk> and Central Health Education Unit <http://www.cheu.gov.hk> for further information.

Centre for Health Protection
Department of Health
May 2005