

# What to do about the flu

## part three

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Unfortunately after several months of what seemed to be slowing down, H5N1 avian influenza appears to have gained a second wind. In recent weeks, outbreaks of the disease have been reported in poultry in Nigeria and more recently in wild swans in central Europe. Given that the news has been progressing rapidly by the day, a quarterly magazine is an ineffective tool to keep members informed of the diseases movements. We encourage you to pay close attention to local news and we'll endeavour to update our website with flu news as it breaks. (<http://worldparrottrust.org/flu>)

As much of Europe is now (finally) encouraging poultry producers and owners to bring their birds indoors, we highlight the importance of all bird owners to also take this high-priority step at this time. If for some reason it is impossible to bring your birds indoors, we suggest that you take three steps to minimize potential exposure to all wild birds.

- Feed and water your birds in a place which wild birds can not access.
- Cover your enclosures or aviaries so that the birds' living areas are not exposed to birds flying overhead.
- Take whatever steps you can to deter wild birds from the vicinity of your enclosures. This last step may involve pruning or covering vegetation which attracts wild birds, using bird netting to cover your aviaries so that wild birds can not enter, moving wild bird feeders away from captive bird areas.

**Tragically there have been human cases and fatalities in Turkey, and it would be foolhardy to expect human cases of H5N1 influenza to stop anytime soon. Consequently, we encourage all people on the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe to exercise extreme caution around wild birds and areas frequented by wild birds.**

## Ten easy steps to avoid bird flu for you and your birds

As many predicted last summer, H5N1 avian influenza or "bird flu" has now arrived in eastern, southern, and central Europe. The virus is not yet known to be contagious between humans, and therefore the threat to Europeans remains minimal and avoidable. Direct contact with infected birds appears to be the primary means of contracting the virus, but once a human is infected it remains extremely dangerous. If some contact with wild birds or poultry is unavoidable, take basic precautions such as immediately showering and washing exposed clothes. If you must come in close contact with birds, bird feathers or faeces, wear a paper mask (rated N95 or better) and latex gloves during exposure, and dispose of them properly.

To help guide responsible and preventative action, we are currently advising the following steps to minimize the risk of you or your birds contracting avian flu. These guidelines are meant to be useful in the context of basic prevention: anyone experiencing flu-like symptoms - fever, cough, sore throat, aching muscles, etc. - should seek medical assistance immediately.

### Captive birds in and around the home

1. If you have captive birds, bring them inside or otherwise completely isolate them from all wild birds and other captive birds. Practice sound biosecurity: do not bring in new birds or allow your birds to have contact with any outside birds, captive or wild. If possible, have your captive birds tested for avian flu by your local veterinarian. Keep detailed records of testing also a specific list of biosecurity measures you have in place for you and your birds.

### Precautions around wild birds- if you have pet or aviary birds then

2. Avoid feeding all wild birds; including the use of bird feeders and feeding ducks or pigeons in city parks or town squares. If you do choose to take this risk, exercise extreme caution (gloves, masks, aprons, etc.) when handling the bird feeders and waterers. Keep all wild bird food, equipment, and clothing well away from your captive bird areas and equipment.

3. Exercise caution in public places frequented by city pigeons and sparrows, avoiding concentrations of birds and areas where they feed and sleep. Take careful note of places where bird faeces accumulates on streets, sidewalks, cars, etc. as an indicator of roosting locations (the main entry sidewalk at London's Heathrow, for instance, often has a prominent accumulation of pigeon faeces awaiting those stepping out of their cars).

4. As summer approaches, avoid bathing and swimming in lakes, rivers, and coastal areas with high concentrations of waterbirds: ducks, swans, geese and gulls in particular.

5. Avoid visiting farms or households with poultry, particularly if the birds are housed outside. If you must visit, take the preventative measures described above when in direct contact with birds or holding areas.

6. Avoid all direct contact with wild birds such as hunting, handling and eating. This is especially true of waterfowl which are more likely to be eaten and may be among the more common carriers of this disease.

7. If you find a dead bird or one that appears to be sick, do not approach it or touch it. If you have one or more outdoor cats which may consume wild birds, note that this strain of avian flu has infected cats in Asia and Europe, although there is no evidence that the cats have passed the virus on to humans.

### Poultry and other birds as food

8. If you choose to eat turkey, duck, or chicken meat, be sure that it is well cooked prior to eating. Commercially produced eggs should already be disinfected prior to shipment, but take extra precautions after handling and cook thoroughly before eating. If you acquire eggs directly from chickens, from a neighbour, or from free-range sources, take the same precautions you would if handling the birds themselves.

9. If you choose to slaughter birds for food, wear protective rubber gloves and glasses, a waterproof apron, and a disposable mask, which fits closely over your nose and mouth (ideally rated N95 or better).

10. If preparing raw poultry or other bird meat for the table, wear gloves and a mask during preparation, and after preparation thoroughly wash and disinfect all knives, containers, cutting surfaces which may have had contact with any uncooked bird meat.