



Press Release: Questions & Answers

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is a serious disease in birds caused by a virus. Birds such as chickens, ducks, and turkeys can get very sick and die quickly from bird flu.

Is it the same as “kai tai haa”?

No, bird flu is not the same as “kai tai haa.” Bird flu does cause symptoms that are similar to “kai tai haa”; i.e. it can cause sudden death, and a high number of deaths. More importantly, humans cannot get infected with “kai tai haa,” but they can get infected by, and die from, bird flu.

Has it been found in Lao PDR?

Bird flu has been reported in poultry in every neighboring country: Thailand, Myanmar, China, Vietnam and Cambodia. There were outbreaks of bird flu in poultry in Laos in early 2004. Most reported outbreaks were in commercial poultry farms in Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet, and Champassak. No human cases were detected.

How does it spread?

The virus, which causes bird flu, can be found in fluid from the eyes, nose and mouth of infected birds, and in feces of infected birds. Wild birds and ducks can carry the virus. Humans can spread the virus from one flock to another through their clothing, shoes, vehicles, equipment and materials. Humans can also spread the virus by transporting and selling sick or dead birds. If it is not quickly controlled bird flu can spread to birds in households, markets, and to the whole country.

How do we prevent the spread?

Keep your poultry healthy. If you see any of these signs in your poultry, report them immediately to the village veterinary worker, village chief, district animal health officer, the Provincial or National Animal Health Center:

- increased sudden death
- high number of deaths over a short time period
- difficult breathing
- diarrhea
- swollen eyes, face, comb
- severe weakness
- bleeding legs and feet

Do not kill, eat, transport or sell sick birds. Keep them penned away from the rest of your flock. Do not import poultry or poultry products from infected countries.

Do not eat dead birds. Do not throw them in a river or pond or leave them lying around. Bury them, in plastic bags if possible and if you have masks and gloves use them while burying. If you have lime, disinfect the surrounding area.

**Are people at risk?**

To date, more than 180 people in the world have been infected, and more than half of them have died. This is a high rate of death, which is why scientists are concerned. Many of those who have died have been in neighboring countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. People who have close contact with infected, sick or dead birds are at risk. These include families with small flocks of native poultry and poultry workers in wet markets or live animal markets. While there is very limited evidence that bird flu transmits from person to person, there are concerns that one day it may be able to spread more easily to humans.

How can we protect ourselves?

Here are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family from avian influenza. These steps will also protect your village and in fact the whole country.

- Always wash your hands with soap and water, especially before and after handling birds and poultry products.
- Do not kill, eat or sell sick birds. Always report and bury birds, which have died of disease.
- Eat well-cooked birds and poultry products. Do not eat or drink blood from birds.
- Cover your mouth with a cloth (or your sleeve) when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands immediately afterwards with soap.
- Do not allow children, the elderly or sick people to come into contact with sick chickens.
- Sweep every day to keep your house and surrounding area clean of poultry feces.

What else can farmers do to prevent bird flu?

If you are a farmer or have a backyard flock:

- When you buy new poultry, keep them separate for at least one week before mixing them with your other birds.
- Keep your poultry healthy by regularly cleaning their housing and by vaccinating them against preventable diseases such as Newcastle disease and fowl cholera.
- Keep chickens, ducks, turkeys, and other types of poultry separate from one another if possible. At the very least, provide each type of poultry with separate overnight housing.
- Keep poultry separate from pigs.
- If you can, keep your poultry in a closed building. Keep them away from wild birds.
- Allow only essential workers and vehicles to enter the farm.
- When burying dead birds, use masks and gloves, and lime to disinfect the surrounding area, if you have them.
- Clean the shoes of workers entering and leaving the farm, and clean and disinfect vehicles and equipment entering and leaving the farm. Make sure to remove feces.
- Do not borrow vehicles and equipment from other farms, or loan yours to them.

What else can we do to prevent bird flu during food preparation and handling?

- Separate raw meat from cooked or ready-to-eat foods to avoid contamination.
- Always wash your hands and utensils with soap and water before and after preparing and eating food.
- Eat well-cooked birds and poultry products.
- Do not eat or drink blood from birds.
- Do not eat raw poultry parts or raw eggs.

**What is the government doing to prevent and control avian influenza (=bird flu)?**

The Government of Lao PDR is committed to the prevention and control of avian influenza.

The Government has established mechanisms for the coordination and the management of avian influenza control and pandemic preparedness planning. The Prime Minister is the chairperson of the National Committee on Communicable Diseases and Control (CDC), which aims at prevention of communicable diseases, including avian influenza. Over the coming months, many activities aimed at strengthening communicable disease control will be carried out. All ministries and provinces will develop detailed contingency plans to follow in the event of an influenza pandemic. The Government is in the process of establishing a National Avian Influenza Coordination Office (NAICO).

With support from the United Nations, the Government has developed a National Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Preparedness Plan, addressing both animal and human health with five strategies. The Government is already taking effective measures to implement that strategy, including increasing surveillance among poultry, and establishing systems for case detection, outbreak investigation and immediate control measures. Information and education programmes are currently being formulated and collaboration with donors and international partners is tight.

Everyone must join to help and protect each other from the spread of avian influenza to keep the poultry and people safe and healthy.

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