

19 February 2015, Cairo – Human cases of avian influenza A (H5N1), also known as bird flu, have reportedly increased in Egypt in recent months. Since mid-November 2014, the number of human cases officially reported by the Ministry of Health and Population of Egypt is 101. This rise is the biggest ever in avian influenza cases reported among humans in Egypt since the first human case was reported in the country in 2006. Currently, WHO is stepping up its efforts to investigate the reasons behind this surge and appropriately advise the Ministries of Health and Population and Agriculture and partner agency Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on control measures to limit the infection in humans.

Since its introduction in Egypt in 2006, the H5N1 virus has been circulating in domestic poultry in the country and has been the source of sporadic human infections. The number of cases reported is higher compared to last year; however, the increase in the number of cases does not change current risk status of this epidemic.

Almost all cases of H5N1 infection in humans have been associated with close contact with infected live or dead birds, or H5N1-contaminated environments. Although the majority of cases reported in recent months were due to close contact by humans with either sick or dead poultry in backyards, in some instances, humans have been reported to have contracted the disease from live poultry markets.

Symptoms of infection in humans include fever, malaise, cough, sore throat and muscle aches. Severe disease and death may result from the complication of pneumonia.

Protect yourself

The best way to prevent infection with bird flu is to avoid sources of exposure whenever possible. Stay safe and take the following precautions.

- To avoid infection, do not touch or approach dead birds
- If you are working closely with birds and have flu-like symptoms, go to hospital immediately
- To avoid disease do not buy or touch live birds in the live poultry market
- Cover poultry cages to prevent infection from migrating birds
- To dispose of dead birds, bury them in a deep hole or pour water and chlorine on them and put them in the rubbish in sturdy bags
- Boiled eggs and well-cooked poultry are safe to eat

- Wear protective equipment when working with birds
- To prevent spread of disease, do not raise poultry on rooftops
- Before and after handling raw poultry and eggs – wash your hands with warm water and soap for a minimum of 30 seconds. When warm water and soap are unavailable, use a waterless alcohol-based (at least 60% alcohol) hand sanitizer
- Do not visit poultry farms or markets where birds are sold or displayed
- Avoid touching surfaces that have bird droppings or fluids on them.

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