

Important Health Notice

Information for Healthcare Professionals

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Update on H7 Avian Influenza Virus in British Columbia

Dear Colleagues:

This notice is to update you on the Avian Influenza outbreak in the Fraser River Valley of British Columbia and to provide you with some guidance and advice with regard to watching for possible symptoms in patients. The Avian Influenza A outbreak in the Fraser River Valley of British Columbia continues to spread, with 20 poultry farms currently infected as of April 8 2004.

WHO was informed on April 02, 2004 of a second poultry worker in BC who has tested positive for Avian Influenza A (H7). Both the confirmed cases developed conjunctivitis which have since resolved. Both cases were mild.

Global Pandemic Preparedness levels are dictated by the epidemiological situation for each local event. Based on epidemiological information provided by Health Canada, the WHO raised the Global Pandemic Preparedness level from Phase 0 level 1 to phase 0 level 2 for the Canadian outbreak (2 or more human infections have occurred with a new virus subtype).

It is not likely but possible that you will see a patient with conjunctivitis and/or influenza like illness (ILI) having had recent exposure to infected or potentially infected poultry, poultry products or persons within the Fraser River Valley, B.C.

We are asking you:

- to ask patients with conjunctivitis and/or influenza like symptoms if there has been recent (within one week) exposure to infected or potentially infected poultry or poultry products in BC,
- to take appropriate specimens (see below),
- to report to your local Health Department cases that meet the Health Canada case definition for a suspected case of Avian Influenza.

Patients presenting with conjunctivitis and/or ILI symptoms **without** the epidemiological link indicated in the case definition should **not** be reported.

The most frequent symptoms of human Avian Influenza A (H7) infection presenting in B.C. are conjunctivitis, runny nose, coryza, sore throat and myalgia. This has occurred only among persons working on farms undergoing depopulation and disinfection.

The recommended specimens to be collected are a conjunctival swab, a nasopharyngeal swab and serology (acute and convalescent). For specimen collection please use a respiratory viral transport media kit (same as for influenza) and send it to the Central Public Health Laboratory in Toronto. It is important that you call your local Public Health Department so they can initiate follow up procedures.

Health Canada's case definition for a Suspected Case of Avian Influenza in humans is:

- experiencing conjunctivitis* with onset between one day of first exposure and seven days of last exposure to infected or potentially infected poultry, poultry products or persons within the Fraser Valley or,
- two or more influenza-like illness (ILI)** defining symptoms with onset between one day of first exposure and seven days of last exposure to infected or potentially infected poultry, poultry products or persons within the Fraser Valley.

*Conjunctivitis-

Two or more symptoms of:

- red eyes
- eyelid/ conjunctival inflammation (swelling)
- tearful eyes
- itching eyes
- painful eyes
- burning eyes
- discharge from eye
- sensitivity to light.

**ILI defining symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- rhinorrhea
- sore throat
- myalgia/arthralgia
- headache

Health Canada's case definition for a Confirmed Case of Avian Influenza in humans is:

Individuals who fulfill the criteria for a suspected case and have:

- laboratory confirmation of influenza A (H7) virus in specimens from the eye (conjunctival swab) or
- respiratory tract (nasal or nasopharyngeal swab or
- nasal wash) at least 12 hours after most recent exposure by:
 - 1) Virus isolation in cell culture, R-Mix culture or,
 - 2) RT-PCR or,
 - 3) Evidence of sero-conversion from acute and convalescent sera with a four fold rise in antibody titre using neutralization testing (not HI).

Duplicate testing is recommended for verification of results.

Further information about Avian Influenza is available at:

- <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/diseases/flu/avian.html>
- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

Yours truly,

(original signed by)

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Assistant Deputy Minister