

Avian influenza: food safety issues

On-going outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in poultry in Asia and, more recently, in Europe have raised concerns about the source of infection and the risk to humans from various exposures. On present evidence, the vast majority of human cases have acquired their infection following direct contact with infected live or dead poultry. WHO is aware of recent concerns that the virus could also spread to humans through contact with contaminated poultry products. To date, no epidemiological data suggest that the disease can be transmitted to humans through properly cooked food (even if contaminated with the virus prior to cooking). However, in a few instances, cases have been linked to consumption of dishes made of raw contaminated poultry blood.

The Department of Food Safety, Zoonoses and Foodborne Diseases of WHO has developed a series of guidance documents to address the concerns related to food safety and food handling with recommendations to maintain the safety of the food supply in and outside avian influenza outbreak area. The INFOSAN notes below have been disseminated through the International Food Safety Authorities Network ([INFOSAN](#)). The recommendation on proper food handling and cooking included in these notes are based on the WHO [5 keys](#) for safer food.