

# TRAVELER'S BULLETIN

## Health: Avian Influenza

### Summary

- Bahrain travellers, long-term residents and businesses overseas should inform themselves about the risks of avian influenza, be prepared to take personal responsibility for their own safety and put appropriate contingency plans in place.
- Bahrainis who live in an avian influenza affected area for an extended period should consider, as a precautionary measure, having access to influenza antiviral medicine for treatment.
- Bahrainis intending to travel to affected countries for shorter periods are at much lower risk of infection but should discuss the risk of avian influenza with their doctor as part of their routine pre-travel health checks.
- If the threat of sustained human-to-human transmission appears serious, we will advise Bahrainis in affected countries to consider leaving. If they don't leave when first advised to do so, they may be prevented from leaving later.
- In case they need to depart an affected country at short notice, Bahrainis should ensure that their travel documents are up to date.

## Avian influenza outbreak

Since 30 December 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed a number of human deaths from avian influenza in Asia.

### Advice for Bahrainis

The Public Health advises Bahrainis who reside in an avian influenza affected area for an extended period to consider, as a precautionary measure, having access to influenza antiviral medicine for treatment. Long term residents are at a greater risk of exposure to avian influenza over time. Medical advice should be sought before antiviral medicines are commenced.

The Public Health advises that Bahrainis intending to travel to avian influenza affected areas for shorter periods are at much lower risk of infection but should discuss the risk of avian influenza with their doctor as part of their routine pre-travel health checks.

Currently there is only a limited availability of influenza antiviral medicines in many countries. Bahrainis should familiarise themselves with the advice regarding personal protective and infection-control measures.

Individual Bahrainis and Bahrain businesses overseas are responsible for securing their own supply of influenza antiviral medicine (such as Tamiflu or fly flue). Bahrain missions and offices overseas will not be in a position to provide influenza antiviral medicines to Bahrainis in affected areas.

Bahrainis should be aware that the delivery of consular assistance to Bahrainis if an outbreak occurs could be severely constrained by local health conditions and restrictions on travel. Bahrain travellers, long term residents and businesses overseas should be prepared in these circumstances to take personal responsibility for their own safety and well-being, and should monitor this Bulletin and the relevant country travel advice for updated information and advice.

If the threat of sustained human-to-human transmission appears serious, we will advise Bahrainis in affected countries to consider leaving, and Bahrainis planning travel to affected countries to reconsider their need to travel. At the same time the Bahrain Government would likely direct its staff in those countries who are not providing emergency services, and all dependants of staff, to depart. As a precautionary measure in case they need to depart at short notice, Bahrainis should ensure that their travel documents are up to date, including passports and visas for any non-Bahrainis family members. Bahrainis who return to Bahrain from any areas affected by human-to-human transmission may be subject to quarantine measures at Bahrain borders.

If the virus mutates to a form where efficient human-to-human transmission occurs, it may spread quickly and local authorities could move quickly to impose restrictions on travel. Bahrainis who don't leave affected countries when first advised to do so may be prevented from leaving later. Borders may be closed, commercial air services may be curtailed or halted and quarantine requirements may further restrict options for leaving. Bahrainis therefore need to consider in advance how they can care for themselves and put appropriate contingency plans in place.

## **Reducing the risk of infection**

People are at risk of contracting avian influenza if they have close contact with infected birds. The virus does not spread easily from birds to people. There is a very low risk of contracting the disease from occasional contact with an infected bird such as when travelling on public transport.

Bahrainis travelling to areas affected by avian influenza can reduce their risk of infection by:

- avoiding situations where they may come into contact with farms and live bird markets, and
- ensuring all uncooked poultry and eggs are handled hygienically, with careful attention to hand washing after handling, and then cooked thoroughly. Proper cooking destroys the virus in poultry and eggs.

## **Avian influenza among birds**

Since December 2004 outbreaks amongst birds, including chickens and ducks, have been reported in Asia.

The WHO is working to support national disease authorities in the affected countries to investigate the outbreaks. The [WHO](#) has not advised against travel to any of the affected countries.

## **Further information**

Information about how the virus spreads from birds to humans, including frequently asked questions about avian influenza, is available from the Ministry of Health, Disease Control Section website: [www.ai.health.gov.bh](http://www.ai.health.gov.bh)