

Vaccines and Bird Flu

The type of influenza (flu) virus that is currently affecting wild and domestic birds in other parts of the world is called highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1. HPAI H5N1 (bird flu) has a high death rate in some birds. It is unusual because it has also infected some people, and over 50% of those known to be infected have died. Most of the infected people have become sick after coming into close contact with infected birds without wearing a mask or using gloves. There is concern that this HPAI H5N1 virus could change and become easily transmitted from person to person, causing a global pandemic, or worldwide human illness. It is important to keep in mind that there is no human influenza pandemic in the world at this time.

- ❖ At this time there is no human H5N1 vaccine available; scientists continue working on vaccine development.
- ❖ Because the avian influenza H5N1 virus continues to change, vaccine development remains challenging. To be most effective, an influenza vaccine must match the current circulating influenza virus.
- ❖ Once a pandemic begins, scientists will determine the exact virus strain that should be used in the vaccine. If the vaccine does not already exist, it will be developed. Production will take 4 to 6 months from the time the pandemic vaccine strain is selected until any vaccine is available. It will take much longer than that for enough vaccine to be available for everyone in the United States.
- ❖ It is highly likely that shortages of vaccine will exist early in the course of a pandemic. It is also possible that no vaccine will be available.
- ❖ A pandemic flu virus will be a new virus that people have not been exposed to before, and our bodies will not have any natural protection from that virus. Therefore, it is likely that everyone will need two doses of the vaccine to become fully protected.
- ❖ The first doses of vaccine will be given to select groups of people. Deciding who those groups are will depend on many factors, including who is most affected by the pandemic strain (e.g., young children, the elderly, those with chronic illness), the symptoms and severity of the disease, which people are critical for maintaining essential services, and how many doses of vaccine are available.

- ❖ Recommendations for which group of people should receive the vaccine, and when they should receive it, will be made based on available data and recommendations from both the NH Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For specific concerns about bird flu, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at www.avianflu.nh.gov or the US Department of Health and Human Services website at www.pandemicflu.gov.