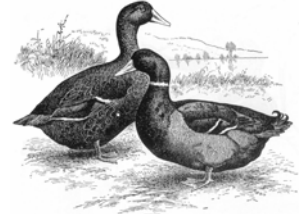




Bird Flu and Public Parks

What is the Asian H5N1 strain of bird flu?

It is one of many strains of bird flu. In 2005, it spread in birds from eastern Asia to Europe and Africa. It is a major problem for poultry farmers and it is killing some wild birds. During the past 3 years, 206 human cases have been detected. This virus does not yet exist in North America. People caught the virus mainly by living in close quarters with their infected backyard flocks of birds, and by slaughtering and plucking infected birds. No one has caught it from simply standing near a wild bird or dead bird. There is a possibility that the virus will mutate and become very contagious between people. This would be called **pandemic flu**, and it would then be a new human disease. This has not happened, and no one can say for sure if it will happen.



Which birds can catch Asian H5N1?

Chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese in other countries have been involved in most outbreaks of the virus. However, over 80 species of birds have been found to be able to catch it, from large birds to small birds. Scientists do not know enough yet to predict how the virus will behave in all bird species.

How is this virus being spread in birds?

Infected migratory birds, smuggled chickens and exotic birds, and equipment contaminated with bird feces may all be contributing to the spread of the virus. The virus is in the feces and saliva of an infected bird. Wild birds may infect poultry when they visit a farm looking for food.

What concerns are there about birds in public parks?

The virus may come to the United States within a year or two. Sick birds, dead birds, and bird feces should be avoided. Sunlight and heat help kill germs, so the more sunlight that shines on fecal matter, the better. It is illegal to kill wild birds in a park. Stopping the feeding of wild birds in a park is the best way to reduce the crowding of birds in parks.

Isn't it cruel to the birds to stop feeding them?

Wild birds fed in parks can become overreliant on food given by people, and begin to lose muscle tone and foraging skills. Wild birds eat vegetation, so they do have alternative food sources in the park even if people stop feeding them. Eventually they will disperse and learn to look many places for food.

I visit public parks with my children. What should I do?

1. Do not let your children step into or touch bird feces or pond water.
2. Do not let children pick up feathers. Feathers to be used in crafts can be disinfected with dilute bleach (1 Tbs bleach in 1 quart water) by an adult.
3. Do not picnic in locations where birds congregate.
4. Sanitize hands before eating. Hands can be cleaned with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
5. Wash hands after getting home. Clean any shoes or clothes soiled with bird feces.

What more should I do?

If you know about a group of birds dying anywhere in Los Angeles County, please report it to **Veterinary Public Health (telephone 562-401-7088, fax 562-401-7112, or at our website <http://lapublichealth.org/vet/disintro.htm>)**.