

OSHA Protecting Employees from Avian Flu Viruses Booklet



Guidance on protecting employees in a variety of different industries.

Introduction

Numerous stories have aired on radio and television or been published in various news media concerning avian influenza and in particular the H5N1 subtype. Unfortunately there is now much confusion about the different human diseases caused by influenza viruses.

Influenza A viruses can cause three distinct diseases in humans: avian, pandemic and seasonal influenza. Avian influenza in humans is rare and the most common route of infection is via direct or indirect contact with secretions (nasal, oral or fecal) from infected poultry. Transmission from human-to-human, if it exists, is extremely rare. However, avian influenza viruses have the potential to mutate or reassort and become pandemic viruses; those that can be readily transmitted between humans and those for which the population has little immunity. If these viruses spread throughout the world, the disease caused by them would be called pandemic influenza and the new viruses would be called pandemic influenza viruses. Previous pandemic influenza episodes have occurred in two or three waves of 6-8 week duration and spanned a 12-18 month period. After this period, the population will have built up immunity to the virus, either naturally or...