

Avian Flu – What is It & Should I Worry About It.

The Avian Influenza Virus A that is being discussed in the press is a strain of influenza virus found primarily in birds and not normally seen in humans. Human influenza viruses are classified as being of the A, B or C variety, with types A and B producing the classic symptoms of influenza in susceptible individuals, while type C does not cause influenza in humans. While the Avian Flu is of the A type, it is primarily transmittable among bird populations but also to some susceptible individuals as well. What makes the current Avian Influenza Virus A strain problematic for humans is that we have not developed any natural immunity to the H5N1 variety whereas we have to the other viral strains.

The natural history of influenza viruses are such that as they are passed from host to host they change form slightly. Therefore, this year's flu isn't like last year's type. However, there is enough of a similarity present so that the body's immune system can recognize it and fight it off. With the H5N1 variety, such a protective mechanism isn't present because it normally does not reside in the human population and a measure of immunity doesn't occur. Because of this the virus causes greater morbidity when it does infect humans as is evidenced by its higher mortality rate. Presently the Avian Flu is only transmissible from birds to birds and now birds to humans. It is not presently transmittable from human to human. However, epidemiologists fear that it is only a matter of time until the Avian Influenza virus mutates so that it can be passed from person to person thus enabling its spread. Once this occurs, the spread is expected to be rapid as it will be difficult to quarantine carriers as is occurring with bird populations.

The last epidemic on record of the H5N1 viral type was the Spanish Flu which occurred in 1918. An outbreak occurred in 1997 in Hong Kong but did not spread. The Spanish Influenza epidemic caused considerable morbidity and mortality around the world. At that time there were very few treatments for influenza other than public health measures, and hospitals and clinics became overwhelmed with patients. The centers that provided the best outcomes were the homeopathic hospitals and clinics, statistically having the lowest mortality rates during this devastating flu outbreak.

Presently the homeopathic community is closely watching the Avian Flu and its effects on the few humans who have contacted it in order to be able to treat it successfully. While the "jury" is still out on whether the Avian Influenza virus will mutate in order to be passed from person to person, we recommend that precautions be taken to limit the spread once it arrives in the US. (See Side Bar)

1. Don't go kissing Tweety Bird.
2. Don't pluck chickens.
3. Stay away from chicken excrement to fertilize the garden.
4. Wear a mask when exposed to anyone who has the Avian Flu.
5. Don't panic if someone in the family gets the flu. Contact your physician as soon as possible.
6. Maintain good nutrition high in antioxidants, fruits and vegetables.
7. Maintain good hygiene through hand washing.

8. Rest, get plenty of sleep and drink lots of fluids. This does not include alcohol or caffeine.