



Health Alert

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Avian Influenza

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Avian Influenza Amidst Global Concerns



Aspen Medical is bringing the looming threat of avian influenza to the attention of our clients. We urge you to take proactive measures against this virus.

Avian influenza, caused by Type A influenza viruses, poses a significant risk due to its potential to mutate from low pathogenicity (LPAI) to high pathogenicity (HPAI). While primarily affecting wild aquatic birds, domestic poultry, and other avian species, recent mutations like H7N3 and H7N9 in Victorian poultry farms highlight the virus's evolving nature. The global spread of the H5N1 strain, now reaching as far as Antarctica, and its increasing ability to infect mammals, including recent cases in New Mexico, underscore the urgent need for vigilance.

The threat of H5N1 evolving to facilitate human-to-human transmission is a grave concern. With a mortality rate exceeding 50%, even isolated human cases in Australia, the US and Cambodia underline the need for robust surveillance and preparedness.

Businesses must adopt a multi-faceted approach to mitigate the risks posed by avian influenza.

The following preparations should be prioritised:

Back-to-basics immediate actions (Next 6 Months)

- **Develop and Update Business Continuity Plans:** Address potential disruptions with strategies for remote work, supply chain continuity, and communication protocols.
- **Implement Health Monitoring Systems:** Establish systems to monitor employee health, detect early signs of illness, and provide access to medical support.

- Enhance Hygiene and Sanitation Practices: Promote regular handwashing, workspace sanitising, and use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Install hand sanitising stations and ensure regular cleaning of high-touch surfaces.

Short to Medium Term Actions

- Vaccination Programs: Encourage seasonal flu vaccinations and stay informed about avian influenza vaccine developments.
- Strengthen Supply Chain Resilience: Identify critical suppliers, develop alternative sourcing strategies, and stockpile essential materials to ensure continuity.
- Conduct Regular Training and Drills: Train employees on biosecurity measures and emergency response protocols and conduct regular drills for preparedness.

Long-Term Actions

- Enhance Collaboration with Health Authorities: Maintain open communication with health authorities, participate in industry-wide initiatives, and share best practices.
- Implement Flexible Work Policies: Develop policies for flexible work arrangements and ensure IT infrastructure supports remote work capabilities.
- Establish Clear Communication Channels: Develop communication plans to keep employees informed about risks, preventive measures, and company policies.
- Financial Preparedness: Assess the financial impact of potential disruptions, ensure sufficient liquidity, and consider business interruption insurance.

The evolving landscape of avian influenza necessitates vigilance, preparedness, and strategic planning. By uniting our efforts today, we can ensure the health and wellbeing of our communities tomorrow. Let us prioritise proactive measures and collaborative strategies to navigate the complexities of avian influenza and safeguard our future.