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Health Protection begins with Hygiene

Bird flu is spreading among wild birds. While our stocks of poultry are in acute danger from this epidemic, transfer of the new bird flu virus to people here in Europe is highly improbable. However it is still important for the general public to be especially vigilant in their conduct in regard to birds, following the general rules for good hygiene.

Here is the most important information for the people living in Berlin:

What should I do if I see a dead bird?

As a matter of principle, never touch a dead or sick bird (or animal) with your bare hands. Report the bird to your local veterinary government office (or, in an emergency, the fire department), especially if it is a water bird or bird of prey. The bird will be brought to the laboratory of the Berlin office for Central Health Tasks (BBGes) to be examined.

Should every dead sparrow, pigeon or other singing bird be reported?

Only if two or more dead singing birds are found together. Sparrows and pigeons are not known to be especially susceptible to the new bird flu virus. Also, more birds die at this time of year than during other seasons. However, the warning against touching dead or sick birds still applies, as it does to all animals. Observe strict hygiene at all times!

What is to be done if a dead or sick bird might have been touched?

Wash the person's hands thoroughly with soap and hot water. Viruses and other pathogens are always present in the excrements (droppings) and other excretions of birds.

Which birds are in especially great danger?

Bird flu is very dangerous for chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese, swans, etc. and birds of prey (e.g. hawks). Therefore, all poultry and other domestic birds must now, here in Berlin, be kept indoors, in stalls or in other completely covered enclosures (e.g. aviaries) at all times so that they are not able to catch the flu from wild birds (or their droppings, which fall out of the sky).

Can our pets be infected with the bird flu?

That is possible for cats when, for example, they eat an infected bird. But there is hardly any danger for cats in areas which have never had the virus. Anyone who has a pet should strictly observe the general rules of good hygiene at all times. In particular, that includes keeping its feeding bowls clean, wearing gloves while cleaning cat toilets and then washing your hands afterwards, as well as everybody washing up before each meal. If a domestic cat catches a bad cold, you must take it to the vet (animal doctor) to be examined. Stay away from stray cats, especially when in areas that have been infected with the virus. After any contact with a stray cat be sure to observe the fundamental rules of hygiene.

In restricted areas (which is an area of 3 km diameter around any place at which an infected dead bird has been found), cats must always be kept at home and dogs may only go outdoors while on a leash. Do this to prevent the virus from spreading further.

Is it still possible to visit animal parks and zoos?

Yes. The precautionary measures against bird flu are also being strictly observed in animal parks and zoos, with all dead wild birds being turned over to a laboratory for examination.

Can children still play in parks?

Here in Berlin there is currently no increased danger of an infection with the bird flu virus.

Is it still possible to eat chicken, duck, turkey, geese, etc?

Yes. Eating chicken, duck, geese and other poultry from Germany is harmless. However, all poultry, should be thoroughly heated and cooked through before eating. Very high temperatures kill off bacteria and viruses.