

Influenza fact sheet

Links between humans and animal Influenza

Influenza viruses are classified as types A,B and C. Influenza A viruses are found in many [species of animals](#), including ducks, chickens, pigs, whales, horses, and seals.

Wild birds are the primary natural reservoir for all subtypes of influenza A viruses and are thought to be the source of influenza A viruses in all other animals.

Avian Influenza is a very serious disease of domestic birds, particularly chickens and ducks, and it appears more and more frequently all over the world. The recent spread in the bird population in Asia is thought to be unprecedented.

Pigs can be infected with both human and avian influenza viruses in addition to swine influenza viruses. Infected pigs get symptoms similar to humans, such as cough, fever, and runny nose. Because pigs are susceptible to avian, human and swine influenza viruses, they potentially may be infected with influenza viruses from different species (e.g. chicken, ducks and humans) at the same time.

Humans are rarely affected by Avian flu. To be contaminated, a person should have a direct contact with infected birds or their excretes. The large epidemics of highly pathogenic avian influenza currently seen in poultry in Asia, and possible widespread presence of the virus in the environment, increase opportunities for human exposure and infection. They also increase opportunities for human and avian influenza viruses to exchange genes. This can occur when humans are simultaneously infected by human and avian influenza viruses. The frequency of such co-infections increases the likelihood that a completely new influenza virus subtype might emerge, carrying sufficient human genes to allow efficient and sustainable person-to-person transmission.

While it is unusual for people to get influenza infections directly from animals, human infections and outbreaks caused by certain avian influenza A viruses have been documented in recent years.