

AVOIDING THE RISK OF ZOO NOTIC INFECTIONS WHEN WORKING WITH POULTRY THAT IS NOT SUSPECTED OF HAVING AVIAN INFLUENZA

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This guidance note has been produced by a Government & Industry Working Group consisting of representatives from the National Farmers Union (NFU), British Egg Industry Council (BEIC), British Poultry Council (BPC), Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Health Protection Agency (HPA), Department of Health (DH), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the State Veterinary Service (SVS)

How infection can occur

Avian influenza (AI) is primarily a disease of birds, including poultry, not humans. People can become infected but this rarely occurs. AI is not the only infection that can be transmitted from poultry to people: such diseases are called zoonoses, e.g. Newcastle disease, Chlamydiosis and Campylobacteriosis. The good occupational hygiene precautions that should always be used when working with poultry to avoid other zoonotic diseases will also control the risk of exposure to AI.

The means by which people become infected with zoonotic diseases vary but commonly include hand to mouth contact with contaminated objects, inhaling or swallowing minute infective particles, and in some cases via cuts or by absorbing them through nasal or conjunctival mucosa. The main risk of infection to poultry workers from avian influenza is from close contact with sick and dead or dying infected poultry or contaminated dust and faeces.

Avoiding the risk of infection

- Wash hands (and arms if necessary) before eating, drinking, smoking, using the telephone, taking medication, applying make-up, inserting contact lenses.
- Cover all new and existing cuts and grazes with waterproof dressings and/or gloves before starting work. If cuts and grazes occur, wash immediately with soap and running water and apply a waterproof dressing.
- Take rest breaks and meal breaks away from the main work area.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing. If you are an employee, your employer should have identified what should be worn for any specific activities you undertake – if you are self employed you need to make your own assessment. For example, when working inside poultry sheds and similar enclosures, to prevent personal contamination and its spread you should wear protective clothing, e.g. Tyvek type disposable or polycotton overalls (with, as appropriate, disposal or thorough cleaning after use). Disposable gloves of lightweight nitrile or vinyl or heavy duty rubber (not latex) gloves that can be disinfected; rubber or polyurethane boots that can be cleaned and disinfected or disposable shoe covers.

For many working environments on poultry farms, respirators with a protection factor of P2 will provide the necessary protection against dust but this will need to be confirmed by the employer's risk assessment or that made by you if you are self employed. For higher risk activities, e.g. where there are high levels of airborne dust containing faecal material (e.g. catching while thinning/clearing or end-cleaning in broiler houses) disposable ori-nasal respirators with a protection factor of P3 (together with suitable eye protection where there is a risk from body fluids/blood) should be worn. P3 offers a very high degree of protection against both infection and dust particles. All respiratory protective equipment should be fit tested.

- Avoid hand-mouth or hand-eye contact – e.g. don't put pens/pencils in mouths or wipe your eyes with your hand.

Follow the [Defra guidance on poultry bio-security measures](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/poultrykeepers.htm) - details can be found on the Defra web site -

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/poultrykeepers.htm>

This guidance applies to all persons working commercially with poultry including the self-employed. Veterinary surgeons and other people working with poultry and birds will also wish to take this guidance into account when undertaking their own risk assessments of safe working practices.