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Questions and Answers

Food Safety and Avian Influenza

Q. Can I get avian influenza from eating poultry or eggs?

A. No. Poultry and eggs that are properly prepared and cooked are safe to eat. Proper food safety practices are important every day. In addition to proper processing, proper handling and cooking of poultry provides protection from viruses and bacteria, including avian influenza. As we remind consumers each and everyday, there are four basic food safety steps to follow: CLEAN, SEPARATE, COOK, and CHILL.

Q. How can USDA assure consumers that avian influenza infected meat will not enter the food supply?

A. The chance of infected poultry entering the food chain is extremely low. As part of the USDA highly pathogenic avian influenza response plan, infected birds do not enter the food supply. Additionally, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service inspection program personnel are assigned to every federally inspected meat, poultry and egg product plant in America. All poultry products for public consumption are inspected for signs of disease both before and after slaughter. The "inspected for wholesomeness by the U.S. Department of Agriculture" seal ensures the poultry is free from visible signs of disease.

Q. Does proper food handling prevent avian influenza?

A. Avian influenza is not transmissible by eating properly prepared poultry, so properly prepared and cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat. The chance of infected poultry or eggs entering the food chain is extremely low because of the rapid onset of symptoms in poultry as well as the safeguards USDA has in place, which include testing of flocks, and Federal inspection programs. USDA works to educate the public about safe food handling practices in response to numerous questions from the public about the human risk associated with avian influenza.

Q. What does proper food handling mean?

A. Proper handling and cooking of poultry provides protection against all avian influenza viruses, as it does against other viruses and bacteria, including *Salmonella* and *E.coli*. Safe food handling and preparation is important at all times. USDA continually reminds consumers to practice safe food handling and preparation every day.

Cooking poultry, eggs, and other poultry products to the proper temperature and preventing cross-contamination between raw and cooked food is the key to safety. You should:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw poultry and eggs;
 - Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw poultry and eggs away from other foods;
 - After cutting raw meat, wash cutting board, knife, and countertops with hot, soapy water;
 - Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 tablespoon chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water;
- and

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- Use a food thermometer to ensure poultry has reached the safe internal temperature of at least 165 °F to kill foodborne germs that might be present, including the avian influenza viruses.

Q. Where can I get more information about safe food handling?

A. Consumers with questions about the safe storage, handling, or preparation of meat, poultry, and egg products, can call the **USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at: 1-888-MPHotline**, that's 1-888-674-6854. The hotline is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Also, "Ask Karen" is the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day to answer your questions at www.fsis.usda.gov.