

Fact Sheet: Avian Influenza Preparedness and Planning in Georgia

Avian Influenza Facts

- Avian flu describes an infection in birds with a bird influenza virus.
- Sometimes an avian virus can infect small numbers of people who have close contact with birds – when this happens the virus often causes severe illness since people have no immunity to the bird virus.
- Sometimes an avian flu virus adapts to humans and spreads like our normal human flu viruses (sick person to well person, or sick person contaminates the environment with virus). Because there is no immunity to bird flu viruses in the human population, a bird flu virus that adapts to humans has the potential to cause pandemic – or worldwide – flu.

Georgia Preparedness Facts

- Pandemic and avian flu response planning has been underway in Georgia since the late 1990's.
- Preparation for a pandemic flu outbreak includes many of the surveillance and control measures of a normal influenza season: measuring the number of people with influenza-like illnesses; healthcare providers collecting clinical specimens from people with influenza-like illnesses; culturing and growing viruses in the state public health laboratory, typing them and submitting them to CDC for further typing; controlling outbreaks in schools, child care facilities, hospitals, long term care facilities, and correctional facilities.
- Many of the issues related to a pandemic flu outbreak are similar to what would occur during a typical influenza season: overburdening of the health care system, particularly emergency rooms; distribution of vaccines and antiviral drugs; illnesses among health care workers. Although during a pandemic these circumstances would occur on a larger scale, our annual response to our typical influenza season is good preparation for a pandemic flu outbreak.
- Much of the planning we've done to prepare for public health emergencies and natural disasters apply to a pandemic flu outbreak as well: hospital surge capacity planning; planning to disseminate drugs and vaccines with the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS); planning for bioterrorism events; and establishing a 24/7 public health emergency number for health care providers and the public.
- Much of the work we've done in response to natural disasters and large events such as the Olympics and the 2004 G-8 Summit apply to preparations for a pandemic flu outbreak: surveillance for unusual illnesses; security for hospitals; provision of health care for large numbers of people on short notice.

- We've done planning and exercises with the Department of Agriculture and the poultry industry around avian influenza, and are working with large employers in the poultry industry to do surveillance for illnesses in workers and set up systems to work with them in delivering information and medical resources.
- The SARS outbreak in Asia in 2003 provided us experience in dealing with a severe illness transmitted by the respiratory route, imported into the US by travelers. The fears and issues presented by this outbreak allowed us to organize resources and develop systems with the health care community to respond to an event very similar to pandemic influenza.

Georgia Poultry Industry Preparedness Facts

In Georgia the poultry industry is a huge economic force, and even in the absence of human disease transmission, an outbreak of avian influenza would be a tremendously devastating event. In response, the Georgia Department of Agriculture in cooperation with industry and governmental partners has done the following:

- Did first avian influenza exercise in 1999; sixteen state and federal agencies participated.
- Developed course materials (2004) and trained 300 University of Georgia Cooperative Extension agents as trainers for Agroterror Awareness. This course includes avian influenza (2005).
- Beginning July 1, 2005, 56 statewide training courses are being delivered by these trainers to first responders and industry personnel; approximately 3500 people will be trained by the end of 2005.
- Developed a State Agriculture Response Team to deal with avian influenza that includes state and federal animal health, public health, and industry personnel.
- Ongoing disease surveillance with the state's 11 poultry labs and two veterinary diagnostic labs testing a statistically significant number of Georgia's poultry flocks for avian influenza.