

Important advice for Policyholders

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Subject title	Important information for travellers to China Avian influenza
Issue Date	20 March 2014
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Recent confirmed cases of avian influenza, in China, have seen many Australians seeking specific advice on their travel plans. With the situation continually developing, it is important to be equipped with the relevant information to best assist you, including key facts about the virus, precautions and advice should you be travelling to affected areas, and where to go for more information.

What to be aware of:

- Avian influenza is primarily a disease of birds but has been known to cause infection in humans.
- The most recent human cases of avian influenza (strain H7N9) were confirmed in January 2014 by authorities in China.
- The risk to humans remains low and there is currently no reason to defer travel to a country affected by avian influenza.
- To date, no evidence has been found that avian influenza can be spread from person to person.
- There is no vaccine available to travellers to protect against avian influenza but a number of precautions can be taken.

About the virus

Although avian influenza (or bird flu) is used to describe influenza virus A subtypes that primarily affect birds, it can pose a threat to human health. The primary risk factor for human infection appears to be direct or indirect exposure to infected animals or contaminated environments.

Since November 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed more than 500 human cases from avian influenza in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam.

As of mid January 2014 cases continue to be reported in China of the H7N9 Virus strain, there is a seasonal increase in the number of cases. Although epidemiological investigations are ongoing for some of the more recent cases, currently no evidence has been found that indicates sustained human-to-human transmissions are occurring. The majority of patients with H7N9 have presented with severe pneumonia, fever, cough and shortness of breath.

I am yet to depart for travel to China

If you are intending to visit affected areas, you should discuss the risk of avian influenza with your doctor when conducting the usual pre-travel health checks.

You should avoid contact with animals and practice good hand hygiene and food safety practices. It is advised to avoid markets, farms or other areas where animals are present (alive or dead), and to eat food that is fully cooked (particularly meat and eggs).

I am currently overseas, or have just returned

If you're currently in, or have recently returned from, China (particularly the regions of Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Henan and Beijing) and been close to live animal markets where birds are present, and you feel unwell with flu-like symptoms, it is suggested you consult a medical practitioner. Australian doctors have been given information on the best approach to investigating whether you might have H7N9 and Chinese authorities have in place a system for assessing and caring for infected patients.

Important advice for Policyholders

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has advised Australians who will be residing in China for extended periods to keep a supply of antiviral medicine to help treat avian influenza but to take it only on the advice of a medical practitioner.

[I would like to find out more](#)

For the most up to date information on the status of avian influenza, please visit The World Health Organisation (WHO) website.

Further information is also available from the Department of Health and Ageing website.

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