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### **AVIAN INFLUENZA (also called Bird Flu)**

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing ([http://www.health.gov.au/avian\\_influenza/index.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/avian_influenza/index.htm)) have advised that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported an outbreak of Avian Influenza in birds in Asia. Millions of birds have been infected as have a small number of people. The people were infected after close contact with chickens in Vietnam and Thailand and to date it has been confirmed that there have been 3 deaths in Thailand and 6 in Vietnam. There is no evidence that the virus has spread from person to person.

Avian Influenza is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. All birds appear to be susceptible, though some species are more resistant to infection than others. It is also called bird flu.

WHO does not at present recommend any restrictions on travel to any country currently experiencing outbreaks of the H5N1 avian infection in poultry flocks, including countries which have also reported cases in humans.

WHO, however does recommend that travellers to areas experiencing outbreaks of this disease should avoid contact with live animal markets and poultry farms. Large amounts of the virus are known to be excreted in the droppings from infected birds.

WHO issued an interim recommendation dated January 26 2004 for protection of persons involved in the mass slaughter of animals infected with avian influenza virus. Appropriate personal protective equipment for cullers and transporters included N95 respirators, European CE P2 respirators or other comparable National Standards for respirators. For example, in Australia, AS/NZS 1716 Class P2.

Technical Update

## **Australian Situation**

There are no current reports of avian influenza in either birds or humans in Australia. Avian influenza has been in Australia in the past and was successfully eradicated from poultry. The last reported case was in 1997 in Tamworth, NSW. Prior outbreaks occurred in commercial poultry Farms in Victoria (1976, 1985 & 1992) and Queensland (1994).

Avian influenza has not been reported in Australia in bird flocks at this time so people working in these industries do not need to take any additional precautions at present. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry web site at (<http://www.daff.gov.au/>) provides information on what to do in the event you suspect an outbreak of avian influenza.

The Australian Department of Health & Ageing has compiled a list of frequently asked questions on their web site ([http://www.health.gov.au/avian\\_influenza/index.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/avian_influenza/index.htm)). The answers are listed in the categories below and are being updated as new information becomes available.

- The outbreak in birds
- Avian influenza in humans
- Prevention and control
- Global measures
- Further information links

As with the SARS outbreak, the Department of Health & Ageing is recommending the use of P2 (N95 equivalent respirators) for protection against the Avian influenza virus.

For any further respiratory protection related issues or advice please contact your local 3M OH&S representative or call the 3M TechAssist on 1800 024 464.

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