

Avian influenza: virus transmission (H5N8) resulting from the consumption of poultry meat and poultry meat products unlikely

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Since November, the avian (coming from birds) influenza virus of the subtype H5N8 and hence poultry plague has been detected in poultry farms in Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Italy.

The subtype H5N8 virus is characterised by its highly pathogenic (strong ability to cause disease) properties for birds. To date, there have been no known cases of human infections with the H5N8 virus.

While conceivable in theory, transmission of the pathogen (H5N8) via infected food is unlikely. Past cases of transmission of other subtypes (H5N1, H7N9) of avian viruses from birds to humans have almost exclusively been attributable to direct contact with infected live birds. There is no evidence to date for the possibility of humans contracting the virus through raw eggs or raw sausage products made from poultry meat of infected animals. When handling and preparing raw poultry meat and poultry meat products, the rules of hygiene should always be applied.

The BfR already published more extensive information on avian influenza viruses in 2007. The Internet pages of the Friedrich Loeffler Institute (www.fli.bund.de), the Robert Koch Institute (www.rki.de) and the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (www.bmel.bund.de) contain more details on the subject of avian influenza.

The highly pathogenic avian influenza virus of subtype H5N8 has been associated with avian influenza outbreaks before, for example in turkeys in Ireland in 1983. Since the beginning of 2014, reports on the frequent detection of a new type of H5N8 in wild birds and poultry in farms in China and South Korea have appeared. Since November, the virus has also been detected in poultry populations in Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Italy.

Although transmission of the pathogen (E5N8) via infected food is conceivable in theory, it is unlikely in practice. Other subtypes (H5N1, H7N9) of avian influenza viruses have in the past been transmitted from birds to humans almost exclusively through direct contact with infected live poultry. There is currently no evidence that it is possible for humans to become infected from raw eggs or raw sausage products made with poultry meat from infected animals. Basic rules of hygiene should always be applied when handling and preparing raw poultry meat and poultry meat products.

The following general rules of basic hygiene apply:

- Store and prepare raw poultry meat products separately from other foods, especially if the latter are not heated again before consumption
- Thoroughly clean utensils and surfaces that have come into contact with raw poultry products with warm water and washing-up liquid
- Immediately dispose of packaging materials and thawing water etc.
- Wash your hands with warm water and soap
- Thoroughly cook poultry dishes; this means that a core temperature of 70 °C must be reached and maintained for at least 2 minutes
- Eggs should be boiled before consumption until both the egg white and the yolk are hard, i.e. for at least 6 minutes, depending on egg size.

The BfR already published additional information on avian influenza viruses in 2007. Frequently Asked Questions on food hygiene in conjunction with bird flu.

A recent video clip entitled “What to do with the chicken in the kitchen?” ([in German](#)) on how to handle poultry meat at home is available on the BfR website.