

Comments and Precautions Related to Bird Flu and The Peregrine Fund

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Human cases of avian influenza in Southeast Asia, and the appearance of this virus in other parts of Asia and Europe, have received considerable attention from the press and health authorities. Although the risk to the general population is very small at this time, we take this seriously. Thus, we are monitoring information about the virus, and are taking the necessary planning steps to ensure the safety of our staff and visitors should the need arise. With diverse projects globally, each location has its own procedures to monitor this developing situation and will work closely with local and regional governments.

The Asiatic strain of the H5N1 avian flu virus is highly contagious and virulent in domestic fowl, and is a major problem for the poultry industry. The virus has also been transmitted sporadically to people, in which it has caused very severe disease. Fortunately, the virus does not spread from one person to another, and all human cases to date have been in people with extensive and intimate contact with infected poultry. The type of contact that people have when visiting zoological collections is not associated with transmission from birds to people. Moreover, the Asiatic strain of H5N1 virus has NOT been detected in the United States or Canada. H5N1 strains of virus are present in North America, but these strains are different from the virulent Asiatic H5N1 strains, and have not been associated with human infections.

Even if the H5N1 virus were present in North America, extensive precautions are in place to prevent the virus from infecting birds at our facilities. Any disease is of great concern globally and at The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey, Boise, Idaho, where we house captive populations of Peregrine Falcons, Aplomado Falcons, California Condors, and smaller numbers of other birds of prey. Birds held exclusively for captive propagation are in secure facilities away from other birds and the public. The only human-bird interactions are with a small number of biologists who manage these populations. Except for condors and a few raptors used for public education, facilities are designed so that not even mosquitoes can enter locations where the raptors are held. Raptors used for public education are few and are also carefully managed. They do not come in contact with any wild or captive non-Peregrine Fund birds. No wild or captive raptors are brought into our facilities without a period of prior quarantine at a remote, specially created facility off the property. Prior to quarantine, testing is performed to ensure the birds are disease free.

Precautions are also in place to prevent introduction of disease to the food used for our captive raptors. At the World Center we raise all avian food used and in a biosecure facility. To access the food production facility, staff must first go through a foot bath and then put on slip-on rubber shoes and protective clothing. Then the person must walk through a second foot/cart bath with chemicals to kill all disease

organisms. Further, only a very few individuals are allowed to enter this facility. Similar procedures are used at The Peregrine Fund's Neotropical Raptor Center in Panama.

For more information and the most current updates on the H5N1 avian influenza virus, please see the Center for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>) and the World Health Organization (http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/avian_faqs/en/index.html).