

BIRD FLU AND RECREATIONAL BOATING

06 February 2006

A few facts

- There are 15 types of bird, or avian, flu.
- Migratory wildfowl, notably wild ducks, are natural carriers of the viruses, but are unlikely to actually develop an infection.
- The risk is that they pass it on to domestic birds, which are much more susceptible to the virus.
- Humans can catch the disease through close contact with live infected birds.
- Birds excrete the virus in their faeces, which dry and become pulverised, and are then inhaled.
- Symptoms are similar to other types of flu - fever, malaise, sore throats and coughs. People can also develop conjunctivitis.
- The majority of cases of avian flu in humans has been workers in live bird markets or where people have handled dead infected birds.
- There have been no recorded cases of bird flu in the UK to date.

Advice for boaters

There is a small possibility that some wild birds may be affected by the highly pathogenic form of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza in the UK. If you come across a suspicious die-off of wild birds please:

- Do not touch them.
- Contact the Government Helpline immediately.
Call 08459 335577 in England, Scotland and Wales
Call 02890 524999 in Northern Ireland

Whilst it would be prudent to limit activities in areas where suspicious die-off has been reported, until the relevant veterinary authority has investigated the situation, it is unlikely that the virus can be spread through water as it is currently thought to be spread through dried faeces and subsequent inhalation.

Websites for further information

DEFRA: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm>

RSPB: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/avianinfluenza/index.asp>

BBC: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3422839.stm>

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