

SAFETY TALK

UPDATE

Avian Flu and Bird Shipments

June 2, 2006

The ongoing outbreak of avian flu in Asia, Europe, Africa and elsewhere continues to cause employees to ask what kinds of birds are mailable and what safety precautions the U.S. government is taking to minimize any potential health risk to Americans.

The Postal Service continues to closely monitor the status of the avian flu situation. We have consulted with other specialized federal agencies such as the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These agencies are best equipped to assess risks associated with the movement of live poultry. The Postal Service will continue to consult with these and the other relevant federal agencies as events unfold and will alter its mailability regulations with regard to birds should the appropriate experts advise us that it is necessary for us to do so.

Meanwhile, current mailability regulations remain in effect. All birds are nonmailable in international mail. Day-old baby poultry and certain types of adult birds are mailable domestically — provided they do not originate from restricted countries where H5N1 has been confirmed in domestic poultry and provided the conditions of the *Domestic Mail Manual* and Publication 52, *Hazardous, Restricted, and Perishable Mail* are met. This includes packaging requirements, such as shipping day-old baby poultry in original and unopened hatchery boxes, using biologically-secure containers for certain adult birds, for example ducks and pigeons, and shipping adult chickens in containers meeting International Safe Transit Association standards.

According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the current risk to Americans from the H5N1 bird flu outbreak in Asia is very low. To date, the strain of H5N1 virus found in Asia, Europe and elsewhere hasn't been found in any birds domestic or wild in the United States, and there have been no human cases of H5N1 flu in the United States. The federal government has recently stepped up its surveillance of wild birds within the United States in order to detect the presence of avian flu as quickly as possible. The USDA also reports the following activities intended to reduce the risk of transmission of avian flu to American birds or poultry:

- **Import Restrictions:** trade restrictions on the importation of poultry and unprocessed poultry products from countries where the H5N1 strain has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised poultry, not in wild or migratory birds. The list of restricted countries changes frequently, and employees are encouraged to regularly check the list at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/embargo.htm> and <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ncie/importing.html>. Additionally, USDA has increased its monitoring of domestic commercial markets for illegally smuggled poultry and poultry products.
- **Quarantine:** All imported live birds must be quarantined for 30 days at a USDA quarantine facility and tested for the avian influenza virus before entering the country. Home quarantine and testing also is required for returning U.S.-origin pet birds.
- **International Assistance:** USDA is working closely with international organizations like the World Organization for Animal Health, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization to assist H5N1 affected countries and other neighboring Asian-Pacific countries, as well as Europe, with disease prevention, management, and eradication activities.
- **Surveillance:** USDA works with federal, state, and industry partners to monitor U.S. bird populations. Surveillance is conducted in four key areas: live bird markets, commercial flocks, backyard flocks, and migratory bird populations.

