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Just the facts: risk of Asian bird flu low

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Asian bird flu has never infected poultry in the United States.

Ever vigilant, the U.S. poultry industry tests continuously to make sure the virus that causes Asian bird flu doesn't get a foothold in commercial poultry flocks.

There is no danger of contracting Asian bird flu from eating or handling chicken or turkey. Since Asian bird flu does not exist in U.S. poultry, there is virtually no chance of coming into contact with meat from infected birds.

The U.S. has banned poultry imports from all countries where Asian bird flu has occurred. Proper cooking and food-handling practices also essentially eliminate any chance of food-related disease.

Most experts don't believe Asian bird flu is likely to become a serious human health issue. At present, the virus that causes Asian bird flu does not easily infect humans.

In spite of all the media attention, a very small number of people (only about 100 mainly in Thailand and Vietnam) have contracted Asian bird flu. Almost all of those infected have had very close, direct contact with diseased birds.

The chance of large numbers of people contracting Asian bird flu is very remote, because virus doesn't spread easily from one person to another or from birds to people.

There is concern that if the virus mutates in such a way that it begins to spread from human to human, many more people could become infected. However, public health professionals in affected countries are working diligently with support from the international community to

control the virus and eliminate this potential threat.

Great effort is being made to prevent Asian bird flu from being introduced into the United States.

Extensive plans have been developed to minimize the chance that Asian bird flu might infect U.S. poultry and to quickly eliminate it in the unlikely case it does.

Federal, state, university, public health, poultry industry trade groups and poultry companies have all worked together to develop a coordinated, rapid and comprehensive response.

If Asian bird flu is detected, a wide area around the outbreak will be immediately quarantined, infected birds will be humanely destroyed and disposed of in an environmentally sound way to stop the chance of any further spread. The U.S. poultry industry has had successfully controlled similar virus-caused diseases and is prepared to contend with this threat.

The modern methods of poultry production in the U.S. makes an Asian bird flu outbreak much less likely here. Most poultry in Asia are kept in people's backyards or allowed to roam free. Wild birds carry the virus that causes the disease and spread it to these "outdoor" poultry.

In the U.S., commercial poultry flocks are kept in environmentally controlled poultry houses where they are protected from contact with wild birds and other vectors that may cause disease.

(This information provided by the University of Georgia Department of Poultry Science, the American Association of Avian Pathologists, the National Chicken Council and the National Turkey Federation.)