

The chicken infected with avian influenza

The classic signs

After an incubation period of 3 to 5 days, infected birds lack an appetite, no longer lay eggs, and show symptoms in the digestive, respiratory, and nervous systems. The most sensitive individuals die rapidly from hemorrhagic septicemia. In many cases, the mortality rate is brutal, killing nearly the entire population of a hen house within a few hours or days.



Heavy subcutaneous congestion in the abdominal region of a pullet infected with avian influenza in Indonesia, 2004 - © CEVA SANTÉ ANIMALE Indonesia.

A new shared epidemic?

Veterinarians, like doctors, know that infected animals can transmit pathogenic agents to the humans who care for them or who eat them. This is called a zoonosis. In regards to bird flu, cases of infection are noted when there is close contact between humans and animals. Although this is not a new phenomenon, it is often misunderstood or ignored.

An old acquaintance

Avian influenza is a poultry disease dreaded by farmers. It effectively can provoke a very high mortality among infected broilers and laying hens, turkeys, quail, guinea fowl, ostrich, geese, and ducks. It first was described clinically in 1878. In 1902, the causative agent was proven to be a virus. This agent was specifically identified in 1961. Avian influenza viruses that either are not or are only slightly pathogenic circulate in all countries, most often without consequence or with a weak impact on the health of poultry.

In contrast, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses provoke a scourge known as **fowl plague**. When spread over a large geographic area, they result in economically devastating epidemics.



*Duck market
in Vietnam, 2003
Jean-Charles Maillard,
© Cirad*

Another disease

The term, **pseudo-plague**, is reserved for Newcastle disease. This is as dangerous for young chickens as avian flu. Furthermore, it presents the same clinical signs, lesions, and epidemiologic profile. Geese and ducks are less affected.