

10 April 2006

## Potential Transmission of Avian Influenza through Water and Wastewater

Local authorities will be aware of concerns in relation to Avian Influenza and should ensure that they have the latest advice and guidance for the protection of public health insofar as potential transmission of infection through water and wastewater is concerned.

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### World Health Organisation

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) there is limited information on Avian Influenza H5N1 Virus presence and stability in water and sewage, its route of transmission from bird to humans through water and sewage, or on associated risks to exposed humans. However, the WHO has published a guidance document summarising the available evidence on avian influenza-related risks to human health associated with water resources, water supplies and sanitation.

Local authorities should familiarise themselves with the WHO document which contains information specifically intended for public authorities involved in the management of water resources and supplies. The document is regularly updated and may be accessed though the following link to the WHO website:

[http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/emerging/avianflu/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/emerging/avianflu/en/index.html)

## Water Supplies

Current advice from the WHO is that water supplies “receiving treatment as recommended in the WHO Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality” are unlikely to pose a significant risk of infection, even if infected waterfowl is present in source waters. On that basis consumers connected to public water supplies, or group schemes with disinfection equipment, are not generally at risk, provided appropriate operational and maintenance standards are implemented and, in particular, that there is an adequate level of residual chlorine throughout the distribution system.

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## Group Water Schemes

Not all group water schemes with private sources have disinfection facilities and there would be a higher potential risk to consumers in such cases in the event of source water becoming contaminated. According to the WHO, the risk can be eliminated by boiling the water.

For group water scheme consumers, local authorities are requested, as a precautionary measure, to advise all group scheme committees, as soon as possible, of the general advice from the WHO in relation to water supplies and:

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- in the case of schemes with disinfection facilities or schemes supplied from public mains, the particular importance in current circumstances of maintaining adequate residual chlorination throughout the distribution network,
- in the case of schemes with private sources, with no disinfection facilities, the need to immediately put boil water precautions in place, in the event of any suspected contamination of the source.

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## Wastewater

The WHO guidelines also elaborate on the potential for transmission of infection to water bodies, including water supply sources, through wastewater discharges.

**Additional Information**

In addition to the WHO website, local authorities should also monitor developments in relation to Avian Influenza on the websites of the Department of Agriculture and Food ([www.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie)) and the Health Services Executive ([www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)).

In the event of specific advice or guidance being required, the Health Services Executive should be contacted in the first instance.

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To: County and City Managers  
Directors of Services (Water Services)