Chicken Little

Should people with HIV fear avian flu?

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No, says American Academy of HIV Medicine's Howard Grossman, MD. "Positive people aren't at higher risk from the bird flu, unless they have very weakened immune systems [as in advanced AIDS]." Either way, it's not a problem in the U.S. at this time, "especially if you don't pluck chickens."

Just in case the bug does eventually mutate so that it jumps from person to person, research is ongoing into therapies such as Tamiflu that may prevent or lessen avian flu symptoms.

Most HIV doctors prefer to focus on avoiding plain old influenza. San Francisco's Lisa Sterman, MD, advises washing hands often and getting vaccinated for flu and pneumonia. She also recommends rinsing your nasal passages—where flu incubates—with saline solution every 12 hours during flu season. Staying healthy is your best defense: "If you are already ill with another infection," she says, "you'll be more susceptible to the bird flu if it flies in."

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