

News story: Avian flu: advice for travellers over Chinese New Year

The Chinese Lunar New Year or Spring Festival begins on Tuesday 5 February 2019, and marks the start of the Year of the Pig. The celebrations end with the Lantern Festival on the 19 February 2019.

Human cases of avian influenza have recently been reported in China, and historically there have been more cases at this time of year. Cases have originated from several provinces and municipalities across Mainland China, and there have been a small numbers of cases among Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan residents who have travelled to mainland China.

The majority of reported human cases in China have had close contact with wild birds or poultry. Although the risk is very low, Public Health England (PHE) and the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) are reminding UK travellers to protect themselves from avian flu by minimising exposure to wild birds and poultry.

Dr Dipti Patel, Director at NaTHNaC, said:

Although the risk to UK residents travelling to the affected areas remains very low, anyone planning to visit China, Hong Kong SAR or Taiwan should minimise their exposure to any birds such as wild birds or at live poultry markets, as a precaution.

We also strongly recommend that people see their GP, pharmacist or travel health clinic ideally 4 to 6 weeks before travel, to check they are in-date with any recommended vaccinations and discuss any other potential health risks.

Dr Gavin Dabrera, PHE's avian flu expert, explained:

People can develop avian flu following close contact with poultry or other birds that are infected with the virus. We strongly urge people travelling to China to avoid visiting live bird and animal markets (including 'wet' markets) and poultry farms, avoid touching dead or dying birds and maintain good hand and personal hygiene.

If travellers experience flu-like illness within 10 days of returning from China, they should call their GP or NHS 111 and report their recent travel.

While the risk to the UK from avian flu is currently seen as being very low, PHE has arrangements in place to deal with emerging diseases. This includes the detection and investigation of suspected cases, and the management of confirmed cases and their

contacts.

Travellers can check [NaTHNaC's TravelHealthPro](#) website for current travel health recommendations for:

PHE has produced [clinical guidance for health professionals in England](#) on the assessment and investigation of patients with severe flu-like illness who have recently returned from China.

PHE has also published [official prevention advice for travellers in English and Chinese](#).