1. What is bird flu? How does it spread?
Bird flu is primarily a disease of birds that live and feed in water; particularly ducks, geese, and swans. Scientists have named this virus “H5N1 influenza.” Bird flu is also known as avian influenza.

This flu virus is highly contagious and has killed many kinds of wild birds. Birds generally catch bird flu by coming into contact with infected birds or their feces (droppings) or from water or soil where infected birds have defecated. Bird flu spreads very quickly among domestic poultry (such as chickens). It rapidly kills most chickens that become infected, usually within two days.

2. How is Bird Flu moving from Asia to Africa?
Scientists used to think that bird flu was being carried by wild birds from Asia to Africa during their seasonal migrations. But after extensive testing, scientists believe that bird flu from Asia is mainly carried to Africa by imported domestic poultry. In Nigeria, scientists have traced the bird flu outbreaks to imported chickens from China.

3. Where are the poultry outbreaks happening?
From mid-December 2003 through 2005, bird flu outbreaks in poultry have been confirmed in the following countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, China (PRC), Hong Kong, Thailand, Laos, Korea, Japan, and Malaysia.

During 2005 bird flu was found in wild birds with more limited domestic poultry outbreaks in Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Turkey.

The first case in Africa was identified in northern Nigeria in February 2006. Since this time, the bird flu has been confirmed in the following African countries: Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan, Cameroon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire.

4. Have any humans been infected by bird flu so far?
From 1997 through April 2006, there have been 205 reported cases of humans infected by the virus. 113 of the infected people have died from the virus. That is an average of less than 15 people per year dying of the bird flu...globally. The current health risk to humans in Ghana is not very high.

5. How do people become infected?
Currently, humans cannot be easily infected with bird flu. Even though millions of birds have been infected with this disease, only 205 cases of bird flu in humans have been detected so far.
The few people who have been infected with bird flu generally have handled dead or sick birds or have come in contact with bird feces (droppings) or the blood of sick birds. It is believed that people are most likely to be infected when they kill, pluck, clean, or prepare infected birds for cooking. Infected bird feces (droppings) or blood can contaminate cages, hen houses, clothing, wheeled chicken carriers, or vehicles. It is possible for people to get infected with the disease if they handle these contaminated items.

6. Does this virus pass easily from birds to humans?
No. The bird flu virus is not easily transmitted from birds to humans, especially if basic hygiene practices are followed (see question 8). Only 205 human cases have been reported since the first detection of the H5N1 virus in 1997 while millions of domestic poultry have been affected.

7. Can infected humans pass the virus to other people?
As of May 2006, there was no good evidence of infected humans passing the H5N1 virus to other people. In the past, a different bird flu virus (H1N1) did evolve so that it was easily passed from humans to humans. It caused a worldwide epidemic in 1918. Today, scientists are watching closely so that they will know very early on if the H5N1 virus changes so that it can be passed more easily from person to person.

8. What can we do to stay safe from bird flu?
1. Do not touch a sick bird or a bird you find dead. Report them to your nearest Agricultural Officer.
2. Wash your hands with ash or soap and water after touching birds.
3. Cook chicken and eggs well before serving (no pink meat or runny eggs).
4. If there is an outbreak in Ghana, try to avoid surfaces that may have been contaminated by bird feces (droppings) or blood (ie, cages, hen houses, clothing, wheeled chicken carriers, or vehicles).

9. What can we do to protect our flocks from the bird flu?
1. Keep your chickens in a closed area.
2. Keep new birds separate from the rest of the flock for at least two weeks.

10. How does bird flu affect us in Ghana? Why is it important for us to do something?
For many families in Ghana, backyard poultry is a source of food and income. Bird flu kills poultry and spreads quickly. It can kill a large flock of chickens in two days. In many countries in Asia, when the disease was found in domestic poultry, it was necessary to kill surrounding flocks of birds, even healthy birds, to stop the virus. Countries like Vietnam and Thailand have been very successful at controlling and decreasing bird flu in their countries. If we are able to keep the bird flu out of Ghana or control the bird flu if it does come to Ghana, we can save many families economic losses.

11. How do I know if my chickens have the bird flu?
The symptoms of Newcastle disease and other bird diseases are very similar to bird flu, so you will not be able to tell at first. But since bird flu is highly contagious, it quickly kills more birds than any other common bird disease. If lots of birds are dying quickly, you will know it is bird flu. It is important to report sick and dying birds to your local Veterinary or Agricultural Officer quickly to keep losses in Ghana to a minimum.

12. Is it safe to eat poultry and poultry products?
YES! Heat from cooking kills the bird flu virus. Well cooked chicken and eggs cannot spread bird flu.