

Down and Feathers are Safe from Avian Flu !

25 October 2005

Although the news of avian flu has been sensationalized by the world's media, only a tiny fraction of the world's poultry is or has ever been infected by the virus. China's avian flu rate is reduced from last year. The probability of finding avian flu in raw (unwashed, unprocessed) down and feathers is therefore extremely small.

Furthermore, the avian flu virus CANNOT survive in down and feathers that have been properly washed and processed. There is NO RISK for down and feather pillows and comforters.

The avian flu virus is a class of the influenza virus and is susceptible to heat, dryness, and chemical disinfectants. If any virus (avian flu or other) did exist in a raw down and feather shipment, the washing, sterilizing, and drying procedures are sufficient to destroy it. Down is first washed with a detergent to remove all dust, dirt, and organic matter. After the down is washed, it is steamed at 120°-130°C for 30 minutes. The avian flu virus can survive only 2-3 minutes at 56°C as reported by Branson W. Ritchie in his book Avian Viruses: Function and Control. Therefore, the washing and steaming process for down and feathers is more than enough to kill the avian flu virus.

Marilu Lingad of the World Health Organization (WHO) states: "Based on the conditions mentioned (30 minutes at 130°C), the virus would be killed. Thus, feather pillows and cushions subjected to these conditions would be safe."

Companies processing down for use in the USA must have a sterilization permit. This permit is only issued after receiving government approval from the State of Pennsylvania. This approval comes only after an on-site plant inspection. Inspectors ensure down and feathers are sanitized correctly and that proper procedures are followed to avoid cross-contamination. All down products that have "STERILIZED" on the USA law tag label use down that has been processed using the above procedure, and are therefore safe.

The question of avian flu in down and feathers is a non-issue with government and other avian flu experts. Countless studies have been done on avian flu; none of them prove or even indicate concern about the transmission of avian flu from down and feathers. The importation of finished products and bulk washed down and feathers has not been restricted. Customs inspectors only make certain that bulk down is clean and dry.

All of the recent media articles reporting the possible dangers of down and feather products cite the same SINGLE source for reference. The author of this single reference is Hugh Pennington, a retired professor in the UK. Both Mr. Pennington and his former employer have since backed away from his initial statements.

All avian flu experts contacted by IDFL state that the avian virus is not likely to be present in raw down and feathers, and if it were, it would be deactivated by the washing and sterilization procedure. Their responses, received by email, are quoted on Page 2 along with other general information about the influenza virus such as how it is transmitted and its vulnerabilities.

Can feather and down products be tested? Yes, the twin cleanliness tests of oxygen number and turbidity determine whether the proper washing procedures have been used. IDFL regularly performs these tests for down processors, finished product manufacturers, importers, distributors, and retail buyers.

---- Compiled by Aaron McAllister, IDFL, 2005

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Quotations and References for Further Information

Eva Pendleton PhD, **Penn State University**, email to IDFL August 2005

“Influenza viruses are readily inactivated by heat, pH extremes and chemical disinfectants. One reference I have shows that avian influenza virus is destroyed in minutes after heating to 56 degrees Celsius. I have no doubt that your treatment is highly effective.” (Reference: Avian Viruses: Function and Control, Branson W. Ritchie, DVM, PhD. 1995. Pg. 361.)

Donald Burke-MD **Johns Hopkins University**, email August 2005

“You are correct, steam heating at 130 degrees C for 30 minutes would completely inactivate influenza virus.”

Marilu Lingad, **World Health Organization**, email August 2005

“Based on the conditions mentioned, (30 minutes at 130 degrees Celsius), the virus would be killed. Thus, feather pillows and cushions subjected to these conditions would be safe.”

Avian Viruses: Function and Control, Author: Branson W. Ritchie, DVM, PhD. 1995
Excellent Reference Book

UC Davis - Website Accessed 01-Aug-2005

http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vetext/INF-PO_AvianInfluenzaFS.html

“Influenza viruses are very sensitive to most detergents and disinfectants. They are readily inactivated by heating and drying.”

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA – APHIS) Website Accessed 01-Aug-2005)

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/pubs/fsheet_faq_notice/fs_ahavianflu.html

“Finished products containing feathers and/or down imported ready for retail sale/commercial distribution, such as mattresses, jackets, pillows, **DO NOT** require a veterinary import permit and are subject to inspection at the port of entry to verify that the feathers and/or down are clean, dry, and free from blood, skin, and manure.”

WHO (World Health Organization) Website Accessed 01-August-2005

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/avian_faqs/en/index.html

The most important control measures are rapid destruction (“culling” or “stamping out”) of all infected or exposed birds, proper disposal of carcasses, and the quarantining and rigorous disinfection of farms. The virus is killed by heat (56 degrees C for 3 hours or 60 degrees C for 30 minutes) and common disinfectants, such as fomalin and iodine compounds.

USAHA (United States Animal Health Association) Gray Book Website

http://www.vet.uga.edu/vpp/gray_book/FAD/avi.htm

This site contains good general information.

USDA Avian Flu Website <http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/news/av/avianflu.htm>

This site has a good reference list.

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