

Australian expert rejects bird flu fears

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A bird medicine specialist says the risk of human bird flu infection is small in Australia and people may still safely eat chicken and keep pet birds.

Dr. Bob Doneley, a professor at the University of Queensland's School of Veterinary Science, said the chances of contracting bird flu from a pet bird are infinitesimally small.

"You're more likely to have a light plane hit by a meteor and fall on your head than somebody getting bird flu off their cockatiel," Queensland's only registered bird specialist said.

Contaminated water is the most common source of infection from bird droppings, he said, but the virus can be spread physically on boots or other clothing.

Doneley said the avian influenza virus is stable in water for up to 200 days and in droppings for four to five days, but can be killed by heat, sunlight and most detergents.

He says his office has been swamped with inquiries from panicked bird owners and neighbors about pet parrots, finches and budgies.

"We're getting three or four phone calls a day from people wanting to know if they should sell their house because their neighbors have got birds," Doneley said.

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