

Summary of the New York Times Bestselling book, *The Great Bird Flu Hoax*, by Dr. Joseph Mercola, with Pam Killeen
by Pam Killeen

The story of the “bird flu” scare is not new. Think of the swine flu, Ebola, the West Nile virus, SARS, anthrax, or mad cow disease. Do they make the bird flu alarm seem more familiar? Think about the “preparing for the worst” messages from the media in the lead-up to Y2K. We’ve seen similar calls to alarm repeatedly throughout history, but they have been magnified over the last several decades with the help of ever more sophisticated forms of media manipulation.

Why do ‘they’ want to frighten you? For one thing, if you’re scared, you’ll keep watching the news to find out more, and the networks can then maintain or increase their ratings and continue to sell ads to tempt you into buying even more goods. The motivation behind any fear campaign is straightforward—there are a number of individuals and corporations that are profiting greatly from the frightened frenzy that is being created. Many groups stand to benefit from the bird flu scare, including the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries and commercial poultry producers.

The title of this book, *The Great Bird Flu Hoax*, is not meant to suggest that the highly pathogenic bird flu virus (H5N1) does not exist, or that people have not died from this strain of the bird flu. The H5N1 virus is genuine, and the deaths it has caused are tragic and not to be disregarded or belittled in any way. Since 1997, when the first human contracted the highly pathogenic bird flu virus (H5N1) in Hong Kong, the disease has affected nearly fifty countries. The bird flu has taken its toll in many areas of Asia, Africa, and Europe, killing approximately 160 people. Millions of birds, both domestic and migratory, have also been killed as a result of the spread of this disease.

After years of media-driven panic about the illness, only a relatively small number of people have been affected by it, compared to the millions of people who have died from many other acute and chronic diseases that genuinely threaten us today.

One of the goals of the book, *The Great Bird Flu Hoax*, is to create awareness surrounding the dangerous and inhumane practices that appear to be the true cause of the bird flu threat — the highly questionable practices inherent within factory farming.

It is no coincidence that the highly pathogenic strain of bird flu has emerged along with the growth of industrialized poultry farming. There is growing evidence that highly infectious bird flu actually originates in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO’s), and is more than likely spread by the globalized poultry trade.

Transporting the birds, eggs, manure and other by-products from these facilities can further increase the risk of spreading the disease.

With a heavy media campaign blaming small farms and live bird markets, there has been a 30–40 percent decrease in demand for live birds. (In contrast, the general global drop in demand for commercial poultry as a result of bird flu has been 3 percent.) This is not an insignificant issue; you might be surprised to learn that the live bird markets, which target sales to the poorest half of the world’s population, represent \$20 billion in world retail sales, and involve 40 million small farms in Asia. If this market continues to decline, the commercial poultry industry stands to benefit substantially.

Other than blaming small poultry producers as being the source of the highly pathogenic bird flu, the media also tends implicate wild migratory birds. However, blaming these birds simply doesn't make sense, as small outdoor flocks have a better chance of keeping viral loads down. If a highly infectious bird flu virus were to infect and kill all the birds in a small flock, the virus likely wouldn't spread and infect other birds. On the other hand, in a CAFO with a high density of birds, the H5N1 virus can spread and multiply very quickly.

On April 14, 2006, Julie Gerberding, the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), participated in a conference designed to encourage state and local planning for pandemics, where she made statements that were in sharp contrast to those of President Bush. In reference to the avian flu, Gerberding said that "there is no evidence that it will be the next pandemic." She noted that although the disease has killed about half of the two hundred people known to have been infected with the virus, the victims were in intense, daily contact with sick flocks, often sharing the same living space, and that only two people had become infected by person-to-person contact.¹⁸ She added that there was "no reason to think it ever will" pass easily between people. Gerberding urged the media to be cautious about how they report on the subject, and pointed out that "there will be temptation for the press to make this into something it is not." In order to prevent irrational panic, Gerberding called for "responsible journalism."

When a production crew from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) interviewed Vancouver's chief medical officer, Dr. John Blatherwick, they expected him to endorse the mainstream message of doom and gloom surrounding the bird flu pandemic. Surprisingly, he laughed at the prospect: "You're more likely to be killing yourself eating big batches of fries and hamburgers—leading up to a heart attack—than you are to catch any of the diseases you're reading about . . . The avian flu is not going to be the next pandemic."

Although Blatherwick agrees that preparedness is important in the event of a real emergency, he disparaged the "sky is falling" message and the idea of wasting resources on something that has yet to materialize. "Worry about walking across the street with the crazy drivers," he argued. "Worry about stuff that is real."

Remember, however, that most cases of avian influenza infection in humans have resulted from direct or close contact with infected domestic poultry, or surfaces contaminated with secretions and excretions from infected birds, not from human-to-human transmission. So if your circumstances don't bring you in close contact with sick birds, your risk for acquiring a bird flu infection is remote at best. In total, there are 144 possible strains of the bird flu (the majority of which are not fatal to humans).

We can learn quite a bit from history. If we go back to 1976, we can examine the swine flu fiasco. We should all be reminded about the side effects of the swine flu fear mongering fiasco and the consequences of the vaccine campaign. Several hundred people developed crippling Guillain-Barré Syndrome after they were injected with this vaccine. Even healthy twenty-year-olds ended up as paraplegics in wheelchairs. Within a few months, claims totaling \$1.3 billion had been filed by victims who had suffered paralysis from the swine flu vaccine.

The vaccine was also blamed for twenty-five deaths. But the swine flu pandemic itself never materialized. The swine flu episode shows how difficult it is to forecast a pandemic and how damaging a rash response can be. More people died from the vaccine than died from the swine flu itself. Investigative journalist Ida Honorof, credited by the *Los Angeles Times* and other publications with breaking some of the biggest stories of our time, called the political response to

the swine flu panic “the most brazen, obscene electioneering ploy” ever, adding that it was proposed by the president “and his coterie of scientific hacks, fabricated to cause pure unadulterated panic and guarantee political capital, rammed through without consideration of people’s health and lives and approved by a band-wagon Congress” eager to make the nation’s “health” a bipartisan concern.

In the case of the bird flu threat, it is important that history not repeat itself. The swine flu fiasco most likely could have been prevented had more people asked more questions. Hopefully, by asking enough questions about the bird flu, we can avoid the same devastating results. Preparing for a pandemic is challenging, because it is difficult to strike a balance between acting and overreacting. President Bush and the rest of the world’s leaders need to rise above panic and politics. They simply cannot afford to make the same mistake Gerald Ford made about the swine flu in 1976.

With television ads and newscasters telling us to get ready for a deadly pandemic, many people are now conveniently primed to take drugs such as Tamiflu or line up to be injected with a vaccine. Because of the media, people are being conditioned to think that the only solution comes from the government or the corporations. Although it’s true that it’s important to be prepared for any disaster, there are many things you can do to prevent disease. For one, you can seek out healthier sources of chicken from local pastured poultry operations. Making other healthy diet and lifestyle choices will help boost your immune systems so that you minimize your chances of getting sick.

Over the last century, we have paid a high price for cheap, processed food. The decrease in the quality of our food supply has not only resulted in the spread of diseases such as mad cow and the bird flu, it has also contributed to the decline in the quality of our health.

The Great Bird Flu Hoax includes many suggestions about what people can do to help improve their health. One of the most important changes you can make to keep yourself from becoming ill is to avoid highly processed foods. You will find that when you return to a diet comprised of traditional whole foods, your food bill will probably go down and your health will improve.

Consumers blindly purchase their chicken meat and eggs not understanding the consequences of supporting the practice of factory farming. But if more people understood the detrimental side effects of industrial farming, they might invest a bit more time and energy and seek to purchase their food from healthier and more environmentally friendly sources (local farms that pasture their animals).

Other measures to implement include getting proper amounts of exercise, sunshine and sleep. Also, start integrating traditional fermented foods back in your diet, including unpasteurized sauerkraut, kefir and yogurt. Ideally, drink raw milk from local farms where they pasture their cows. In order to minimize or avoid your exposure to pesticides, buy foods that have been raised organically from local farms.

In summary, perhaps Florence Nightingale said it best: “The specific disease doctrine is the grand refuge of weak, uncultured, unstable minds, such as now rule in the medical profession. There are no specific diseases; there are specific disease conditions.” In other words, disease is more strongly related to diet, lifestyle and the environment than to the “germ” that is being blamed for the disease.

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