What Is The Avian Flu?
The Avian flu is a virus that is carried by birds. A new strain of the virus, the H5N1, is passed to humans through the handling of birds.

While seasonal flu usually affects the very young and the very old, kills only 35,000 people annually in the United States, and can be vaccinated against, the Avian flu has no immunity nor vaccine, and has the potential to kill millions of people.

Why Should You Be Concerned?
When it comes to the H5N1 virus, our immune system is a blank slate. Until we know the specifics of the virus, we cannot create a vaccine. If a pandemic arises, it will take months to produce and distribute the vaccine.

It is highly infectious and is easily transmitted by body fluids through the eyes, nose, and mouth. The Avian flu’s incubation period, or time between exposure and symptoms, is 2-8 days. Those with the virus may not know they even have it until it’s too late.

Why Is It Important To Act Now?
Half of those who have contracted the Avian virus, through the handling of poultry, have died.

The virus is being spread by migratory birds and can be transmitted from birds to mammals (including humans). It’s resistant to commonly used antiviral medications and the virus continues to mutate.

How Can The IAFF Help?
The IAFF’s main concern is the health and safety of its members. Through grant funding, the Hazardous Materials/WMD Training Department has developed an 8-hour Infectious Disease program. Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Determine if they are up-to-date on recommended immunizations and screenings
- Identify the measures that need to be taken when responding to prevent possible exposure
- Identify the differences between seasonal, epidemic, and pandemic infections