

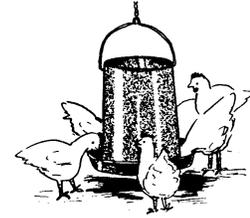


The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service

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BACKYARD FLOCK TIP . . .

DISEASE PREVENTION PRACTICES FOR SMALL POULTRY FLOCKS

As the popularity of small scale poultry production increases and producers seek avenues to sell their poultry products, small flock owners need to be mindful of their flock health and endeavor to take needed steps to prevent the spread of disease to other poultry

Unfortunately, many of the respiratory diseases of poultry have similar clinical signs. Sneezing, gurgling, labored breathing, nasal discharge, swollen eyes and head all are symptoms that can be associated with respiratory disease. Laboratory analysis is often needed to differentiate one disease from another. Of the respiratory diseases that can strike poultry, the three of most concern are LT, IB and AI.

1) Laryngotracheitis (LT) is an acute, highly contagious disease of chickens. Classic signs include labored breathing with extended neck, choking, sneezing and vigorous shaking of the head. Mortality is often high with this infection.

2) Infectious Bronchitis (IB) is a highly contagious, rapid spreading disease. Symptoms may include eye and nasal discharge, choking, and sneezing. Mortality can be high in young birds.

3) Avian Influenza (AI), while not common, has the potential to inflict serious damage in any flock. The impact of this disease can range from minor respiratory infection to 100% mortality, depending on the strain of virus. Symptoms that can be exhibited include choking, sneezing, tearing, huddling, ruffled feathers, and swelling of the head and face. Proper quarantine or depopulation of AI positive flocks is essential in preventing the spread of this potentially devastating disease.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State College, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating.
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An Ounce of Prevention...

Everyone has heard the phrase: *an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure*. This holds true from the smallest backyard flock to the largest commercial complex. Minimizing disease in small flocks is important since they can act as reservoirs of transmissible disease to the commercial poultry industry.

1) The first step in disease prevention is knowing the enemy. In the case of colds and flu, viruses are the culprit. Viruses can infiltrate a flock by air, wild birds, insect and rodent pests, new additions to the flock, and human traffic. Antibiotic treatments will not rid your birds of these organisms. With viral disease, there is no effective treatment once a flock has developed the disease. Prevention of viral disease is through effective husbandry and in some cases by vaccination. Thorough sanitation, disinfection, and reduced exposure to outside sources of birds, rodents, and insect pests can reduce the incidence of viral infection.

2) Early recognition of disease can reduce the spread of infection. Look for changes in eating, drinking, and behavioral habits and for signs and sounds of respiratory distress. Look for swelling in the face and eyes as this can be another sign of the development of respiratory disease.

3) Purchase your poultry stock from reputable dealers, preferably those that participate with the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP). Signs of disease usually appear 6-12 days after natural exposure. Therefore, before introduction into the flock, quarantine new birds from the existing flock for at least 3 weeks, watching for signs and symptoms of disease. Treat the new birds for internal and external parasites before mixing them with the existing flock.

4) Separate your flock by age, keeping young birds away from breeding stock to give them time to develop their immune systems. Separate the species where and when possible. Some species may not be affected by certain diseases and yet may serve as carriers of disease to another species that is susceptible. Waterfowl in particular serve as unaffected carriers of disease organisms.

5) Be mindful of animals, objects, and people that enter your premises. Respiratory discharge, feces, and bird-to-bird contact are the main modes of viral transmission.

6) Minimize free ranging of the flock by maintaining some form of confinement to lessen the chance for exposure.

7) Maintain good air quality through ventilation while providing needed warmth. Block drafts to minimize chilling and huddling. Cold-stressed birds are more susceptible to disease than birds kept in a stable temperature environment.

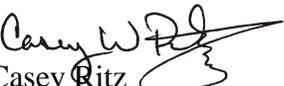
8) Provide appropriate nutrition. Use properly formulated diets as found at commercial retailers. Nutrient requirements will increase during the winter months when birds have to compensate for low temperatures in their living quarters.

9) Implement wild bird and pest control measures. Wild birds, particularly waterfowl, can serve as reservoirs of respiratory disease. Rodents and insects have been shown to harbor pathogens that are transmissible to poultry.

10) When birds die from disease or unknown causes, rapid disposal of carcasses is important to prevent disease transfer. Mortality should be removed promptly to prevent scavenging by the remaining birds. Bury, burn, or compost your mortality away from the rest of the flock.

11) Do not sell diseased or suspect birds through local avenues such as flea markets or live animal sales, as this will only perpetuate the spread of disease to unprotected flocks.

Implementing these disease prevention practices can help promote health and well being to your poultry enterprise and reduce the frustration and economic loss often associated with death loss due to preventable disease outbreak.


Casey Ritz
Extension Poultry Scientist

Extension County Coordinator/Agent

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject.”