

Chicken Diseases and Prevention Tips

Bad Behavior, nutritional deficiencies and diseases can cause a lot of grief for chicken owners. Here are general tips on how to prevent these poultry problems in your flock.

By Jose A. Linares, DVM, ACPV and John El-Attrache, PhD

Infectious diseases do not spontaneously appear.

Disinfect to Protect!

Routine disinfecting is one of the single most important things you can do to for your flock. First clean all surfaces with a detergent.

Disinfectants work best on cleaned surfaces, but remember that a clean surface does not mean a disease-free surface. Disinfectants are not effective immediately after application—they require at least 30 minutes to destroy infectious organisms. Warm disinfectant solutions break up residue better than cold solutions.

Let all surfaces dry completely before using. Remember to follow the manufacturer's recommendations for dilution and use.

Common disinfectants: Hydrogen peroxide, Iodine and Chlorine

Almost all infectious diseases are introduced into a flock by means that go unnoticed, such as inadvertently carrying an infectious disease on shoes or clothing and then tending to chickens.

Just as common are introductions of disease from equipment, feed, other animals, pests, vermin, migratory waterfowl, and most commonly, from new birds introduced to an existing flock.

No. 1 Tip: Keep Them Clean

Preventing disease in flocks entails proper management and sanitation practices, such as thorough cleaning of equipment and of facilities with proper disinfectants, and minimizing or eliminating the introduction of new birds to your flock.

Biosecurity measures such as limiting contact with visitors and preventing contact with other birds such as ducks, sparrows and pigeons will reduce the risk of disease in your chickens.

Don't Be Afraid to Quarantine

When an unhealthy bird is noticed, it is important to immediately quarantine it and accurately diagnose the disease. By expediting the treatment of infected birds, you'll prevent further spread of the disease.

Top Diseases

In general, a sick chicken is less active, retracts its neck close to its body and has an unkempt appearance, but not all diseases have the same presentation. Top 12 diseases to be aware of: Bad Behavior: Pecking and Cannibalism Nutritional deficiencies: Rickets Vitamin A Deficiency Parasites: Lice Infestation Coccidiosis Ascariasis—Roundworm Capillariasis or Hairworm Respiratory Disease: Mycoplasmosis Bacterial Disease: Colibacillosis Fowl Cholera Viral Disease: Fowl Pox Avian Influenza (HPAI) and Exotic Newcastle Disease (END)

Vaccination if Past Problems Known

Vaccination is seldom used by small-flock owners due to the expense and limited availability of vaccines, the simple lack of disease in small flocks, the unknown presence of disease and the improper diagnosis of disease.

Vaccination should be performed if birds have had a disease problem in the past, if they are transported on and off premises regularly and if birds are continually introduced to an existing flock.

Good husbandry should provide the small-flock owner and hobbyist with healthy, disease-free chickens without the heavy use of medications.

This article contains excerpts from "Top 12 Chicken Ailments" by By Jose A. Linares, DVM, ACPV and John El-Attrache,

PhD. The entire article can be found in the Popular Farming Series: Chickens, available for purchase online.

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