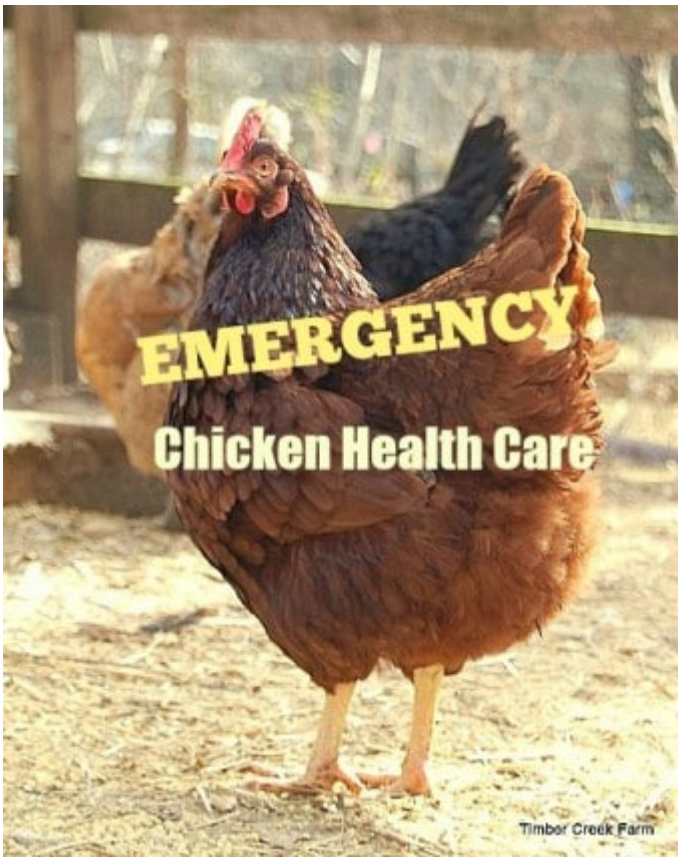
Emergency Chicken Health Care

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It’s a feeling of helplessness when you find one of your chickens hurt or ill and you don’t have anything on hand to begin treatment. Many first aid kits for livestock or general purpose first aid kits will have some of the items necessary to help emergency chicken health care. However, its better to build a kit that will meet the needs of your chickens.

What to Look For

First, it is important to recognize normal behavior for your flock members. Chickens are almost always busy going about their daily business of eating, scratching and searching for more to eat and more to scratch. They interrupt this activity to take a dust bath or bask for a moment in the sunshine. Each member of the flock will have its own personality that shines through in these activities and it pays to take note of this.

Now when you notice a marked different behavior or lack of activity, you can be alert to a possible health problem or injury.

Initial signs of illness can include, droopy appearance and standing off from the flock, lack of appetite, absence of egg production, loose runny poop, swelling of crop or other body part, discolored or pale comb or wattles.

Early Care is Essential!

Providing early care is critical because chickens will hide the signs of illness as much or as long as possible to not look like easy prey. It also protects them from being picked on by flock members. Because they hide the signs of a problem, chickens can go down hill quickly. It pays to be prepared with a first aid box or kit that provides quick aid the chicken. You will lose precious time if you need to run to a store or wait for the veterinarian to return a phone call. For any life threatening emergency though, I would still recommend placing that call to the vet and then administer first aid while you await further instruction.



Start by having a safe and secure place to isolate a sick or injured chicken while you treat the problem. The patient will need peace and quiet, access to water and food and the freedom from being harassed and bullied by flock mates. Have this spot in mind ahead of time. We never know when an emergency can occur. Electrolytes in the water can help at this point but use caution and do not force liquid into a chicken because you can cause the liquid to get into the lungs.

Learn how to pick up and carry a chicken. The best way is to use two hands, covering the wings so they aren’t able to flap wildly in your face. Lift the chicken and turn it facing backwards while tucking it under one arm. Now you have control of the wings and the feet for carrying and examination purposes.

When examining an injured bird, handle the chicken securely and firmly so it feels safe and not threatened. Avoid loud noises and sudden startling movements.

Cleaning wounds

I start by cleaning out the wound with a sterile saline solution. Once clean of dirt and debris I can assess whether the wound will need a veterinarian’s care or if I can treat and bandage it myself. Next, give the wound a good rinse with hydrogen peroxide and/or Veterycin Wound Care solution. If bleeding is not controlled, try packing the wound with cornstarch which should slow or stop blood flow in the area. Plantain leaves can also slow the bleeding.

Leave shallow wounds open and not bandaged. Coat with an antiseptic like Blu-Kote to prohibit pecking by flock members of the red bloody area. Bandaging chicken anatomy takes some creativity. My favorite method of bandaging a wound uses antiseptic ointment, covered by a gauze pad, followed by wrapping with gauze. I finish the wrapping with a length of vet wrap, a stretchy self sticking wrap sold in farm supply stores.

How often you need to re-wrap the injury will depend on if you can let the chicken out to roam around with the flock or if it has to stay isolated to recover. I suggest at least a daily check and apply clean bandages, which will allow you to check for healing or signs of infection.

Broken bones

Broken toes and legs can be splinted and wrapped much the same way as a wound. Make sure to not wrap so tightly that the blood circulation is compromised. Pipe cleaners, stiff cardboard, Popsicle sticks are all items that might work as splints for toes and legs.



First Aid Kit

These are the items I keep handy for chicken or any poultry emergency.

Saline Solution

Hydrogen Peroxide

Gauze pads and gauze wrap

Vet Wrap

Corn Starch to control bleeding

Antibiotic/Antiseptic ointment

Blue-Kote – blue colored antiseptic spray to coat the area and prohibit picking

Vetrycin Wound Spray

Cotton swabs

Tweezers

Syringe

Electrical tape to secure bandages because it doesn’t lose its stickiness when wet.



And a large towel is helpful when holding a frightened chicken. Use the towel to wrap around the chicken to prevent it from flapping and trying to escape.



Hope this helps you become more prepared for chicken health care emergencies on your homestead. Emergency chicken health care plays an important role in the bird’s recovery and prognosis.