

# Chicken Disease and Illness in Your Flock



There are people won't raise chickens because of chicken disease and illness that may strike the flock. This is a valid concern for every chicken owner. We should be aware of the common chicken diseases, but, I don't feel it is a reason to avoid raising backyard chickens. There are health benefits in fresh eggs. Chickens who eat only healthy food and free range goodies provide us with good nutrition. Also, the free compost from feeding the flock, when carefully tended, will keep your garden soil full of healthy nutrients. This will enable you to raise healthier vegetables. While those healthy chickens are out foraging, they will more than eat their weight in insects, including ticks. You can build your own ecosystem in your backyard. However, chicken diseases do exist and can make your flock ill. Knowing the signs and symptoms of chicken disease and how chickens appear when ill is important.



a healthy chicken is usually busy all the time.

The earlier you notice a symptom or sign of chicken disease in your chicken, the better your chance of correcting the problem and saving the chicken's life. Lets not kid around. We all get attached to our laying hens and their protective roosters. These birds supply us with eggs on a daily basis and we get to know their individual behavior and personalities. It is hard to see them feeling poorly, and it's natural for us to want to help them feel better.

The first sign of chicken disease or illness could be anything out of the ordinary behavior for your chicken.

If your chicken is usually the dominant hen and you notice it being picked on, or withdrawing from the flock, something is probably wrong. The chicken may be unwell and trying to stay away from the other chickens. It takes effort to maintain a high place in the pecking order and a sick chicken may not have the strength or energy to do this. Chicken disease and illness can vary from mild to severe. The chicken disease can be metabolic, viral or bacterial.

## **Signs of Chicken Disease and Illness**

- Ruffled or unkempt feathers
- Chicken is self isolating from the flock
- Chicken is not pecking, scratching and eating
- Egg laying in hens has ceased
- Pale comb and wattles
- Cough, watery eyes, raspy breathing



healthy chickens take dust bathing and grooming very seriously

# Viral Illness in Chickens

Since there are no known cures for viruses, supporting the bird while it attempts to recover is the best you can do. First, and most important, isolate any chicken that appears sick. You need to do this quickly, as it is your only means of keeping the spread of chicken disease at a minimum. I keep extra dog crates and carriers on the farm for this purpose and for transporting a sick or injured animal.

There are products available that may help support the immune system of the chicken. Vet RX is one product that is herbal and natural and widely available. A few drops are added to the drinking water. Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) can be added to the drinking water too. I use one or the other, not both at the same time. ACV helps maintain a healthy digestive tract because of its probiotic properties. I use it regularly and especially when runny poo is accompanied by an unwell looking chicken. VetRX is my go to remedy for upper respiratory symptoms and general unwell appearing chicken.

Fresh and dried herbs are useful against viral illness too. Herbs have so much nutrient and vitamin value. Thyme, mint, lavender, and oregano are part of my first response when a chicken is ill. I add them to the isolation coop/crate, so they add healing aroma therapy and some nutrition if the hen decides to eat the herbs. Do not return a sick hen to the flock.



Check fluffy butts for runny poop or clogged vents which could indicate an illness

# Bacterial and Parasitic Chicken

# Disease

Staphylococcus, E. Coli, and Salmonella can all cause serious chicken illness and also make humans and pets sick. These can be treated with antibiotics designed for poultry and naturally, using herbs and probiotics. Oregano has natural antibiotic properties and is useful in the fight against these bacterial diseases. Keeping the chickens in your flock healthy with the use of herbs, apple cider vinegar and other probiotics, and using fermented chicken feed will help prevent illness from taking hold. Adding fresh vegetables as a treat adds more health producing vitamins, fiber and minerals. Allowing your chickens to forage and free range in a safe environment or while supervised will also help them stay healthy. If a bacterial illness makes your chickens sick, you might choose to use a chicken antibiotic to cure the illness and then reinforce this with healthy herbs and nutrition.

Parasites such as worms, protozoa, mites, lice and microorganisms such as cocci, also affect the chicken flock's health. Similar treatments to bacterial infections may help the flock return to health or keep them healthy in the first place. Keeping the immune system of your chicken healthy will lesson the chance that illness will happen.



Ms. Featherfoot was ill and wanted to be by herself

## Metabolic Disease and Other Health Issues

Even healthy chickens can end up with a problem. The crop can become impacted leading to illness or a condition called sour crop. Food can become packed in the crop and the crop won't empty. This can lead to yeast buildup in the crop. Long grass is often a culprit in my flock. We attempt to keep the grass

trimmed to avoid this happening. The chicken can be made to throw up impacted feed by massaging upwards from the crop and then turning the chicken upside down to help her throw up the contents of the crop.

When the impacted crop is full of long grass, massaging downwards to try to help the crop empty may help. A few drops of olive oil might help the impacted feed pass through. Withholding feed for 24 hours may help the crop empty. A small bit of plain yogurt or scrambled egg after the fast is recommended. The yogurt will reintroduce healthy bacteria to the digestive tract. The chicken should be isolated while the crop heals and checked frequently for healthy crop action. Having poultry grit available free choice can prevent impacted crop. I have had two chickens with impacted crop. Massaging, olive oil, fasting and more massaging helped them finally pass the clog. As always, consult your veterinarian when the condition does not improve in a short time. Only you can make the decision about the need for a veterinarian's help.

Vent prolapse can occur if a hen is egg bound or straining to lay a large egg. The strain causes the muscles to weaken and the vent prolapses. This means that the inside of the reproductive tract ending in the vent, pops out. The egg may still be inside the chicken. Proceed carefully, using gloves and lubricant to pop it back inside. Do not use any pain reliever product, but plain Preparation H or witch hazel can be used. These products will sooth and shrink the swollen tissue.

## **Pecking order and Bullying**

These issues are not health related but can lead to a chicken withdrawing from the flock, not eating enough, or drinking enough and becoming more susceptible to illness. Watch your chickens for signs of being bullied, and take care of any aggression issues quickly. I usually find that a time out for

the bully works wonders in stopping the behavior. A bully hen or rooster, spending a day in a dog crate with food and water but no interaction with the flock often breaks the cycle. An attitude adjustment works wonders!

