

Sick Birds

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You should always be monitoring your birds for any signs of sickness. If problems are noticed early, there is a better chance for successful treatment and lower bird mortality or production loss. This is described in further detail in the **Biosecurity Principle 2** factsheet (2.3).

Every animal owner should establish a relationship with a veterinarian for consultation and diagnostic services. Under the Veterinary Act, a legitimate veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is required for your veterinarian to legally dispense drugs and other medications. This is very important when you encounter a disease problem that would necessitate treatment or any further action that may involve government regulations. A listing of veterinarians registered with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario can be found at: <http://www.cvo.org/>

Veterinarians are educated and trained to diagnose and treat animal diseases. Many practicing veterinarians do not specialize in poultry medicine/diagnostics. Nevertheless, they should be able to quickly diagnose most common avian problems and send appropriate tissue samples to the Animal Health Laboratory (AHL) at the University of Guelph for further testing if necessary. A veterinarian at the AHL will report back to your veterinarian with the results. He or she can then provide you with an interpretation of these laboratory results as well as make recommendations on medication, vaccination, and possible changes in bird management to treat and prevent the further spread of disease.

Scabs on the face and comb of this chicken are consistent with Avian Pox virus infection.



Submitting Samples to your Veterinarian or to the Animal Health Lab (AHL)



Head tilts and neck twisting are signs of problems with the nervous system.

When submitting samples, select specimens and/or freshly dead carcasses that are representative of the problem. Whenever possible, make sure that they have not been treated with antibiotics. Call ahead so the veterinarian or laboratory knows that you will be submitting samples and to determine what information is required so that your submission can be analyzed as quickly as possible.

Obtaining useful/accurate results from your veterinarian or the AHL requires good samples and a complete history. Submission forms for the AHL require standard information like the species, breed, age, sex, weight of the bird(s), flock statistics and relevant bird/flock history. A summary of management practices, recent medications, vaccinations and clinical symptoms are all helpful.

Below is a more detailed list of information that will help in the diagnosis and resolution of your problem. Good background information will increase the chances of a more accurate and rapid diagnosis. This is information that should be readily available as part of your regular record keeping.

History of the Problem

Where possible list dates of onset and/or duration.

- General abnormalities – sudden death, morbidity (the number of clinically sick birds), droopiness, depression, lack of appetite, ruffled feathers, abnormal color of wattles and combs, dehydration, loss of feathers, etc.
- Respiratory system – sound of fluid mucus in the airways (rales), gasping, coughing, swelling of areas around eyes, inflamed sinuses, watery eyes, nasal exudates, etc.
- Digestive system – loose droppings, diarrhea, abnormal color of feces, big belly, etc.
- Nervous system – head shaking, neck twisting, abnormal extension of legs, circling, etc.
- Skin and musculoskeletal system – scratches, abnormal discoloration, lumps, lameness, scaly legs, twisted legs, abnormal back curvature, etc.
- Reproductive system – drop in egg production, poor egg quality: thin shell, abnormal shape, color, and size, etc.



Leg problems or paralysis can cause difficulty with mobility.

Flock Description and History

- Size of the flock/Number of birds at risk.
- Number (or %) sick.
- Number (or %) dead (distinguish natural deaths vs. culls).
- New bird arrivals? Where did they come from; their medication/vaccination history?
- Are there other species on farm? How much contact is there with these other species and the birds?
- Have the birds been to a show or race recently?
- Have they been moved from one barn/loft to another recently?
- Have they had normal molting and brooding behaviour?

Swollen face or eyes. Possible respiratory problems.



Management Practices – Feed and Water

- What type of feed – any recent changes in feed or feed supplier?
- Are there any feed additives?
- What is the source of water (city, well, surface, cistern, etc.) and any recent changes in the source?
- Is the drinking water treated or has the treatment changed? (i.e. filtered, chlorinated, etc.)
- Any changes in the watering system? (i.e. from troughs to nipple drinkers)
- Any water additives used? (i.e. apple cider vinegar, vitamin packs, antibiotics, etc)

Management Practices – Housing

- Access to outside.
- Access to open water.
- Access to wildlife (mainly wild bird populations).
- Cage or housing system.
- Litter/bedding materials, (type of bedding, changes, source).
- Other: ventilation problems, weather or temperature changes, abnormal noise, electrical surges, black-out, recent use of insecticides and/or herbicides, etc.

Pendulous or distended crop.



I think my birds are sick, what do I do?



Caring for animals is difficult and every type of animal operation, whether this is a large animal farm, a commercial poultry operation, or a hobby farm should have a health program and access to a licensed veterinarian for consultation and diagnostic services.



FACTSHEET 1.3
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TAKE HOME MESSAGE

- Develop a relationship with your local veterinarian before health problems arise.
- Be proactive and develop a health care program for your birds.
- When birds are sick be sure to carefully select representative samples for submission.
- Provide a complete and detailed history of the problem.
- Seek assistance as soon as a problem is identified.



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CONTACT

OMAFRA's
Agricultural
Information
Contact Centre:
1-877-424-1300

For information on good health management practices refer to the other factsheets in this kit.

For more information on submitting your birds for testing at the Animal Health lab, visit:
www.labservices.uoguelph.ca/units/ahl/