

Biosecurity Recommendations for Small Flock Poultry Owners

People who raise "backyard flocks" - poultry or gamebirds for personal or limited commercial purposes - should be aware of the risk to their birds, and to commercial poultry, from diseases such as avian influenza virus. Preventive measures taken to minimize the introduction and spread of diseases and other hazards are referred to as "biosecurity." The following simple, inexpensive biosecurity recommendations can be very effective in preventing a serious disease outbreak.

Restrict visitors and observe proper hygiene

Contaminated equipment and people can introduce many disease-causing agents, such as bacteria and viruses, to your flock. These microscopic organisms can be carried on boots, clothing and vehicles, even if they appear clean.

- Restrict contact with your birds to those people caring for them. If you allow visitors, provide them with clean coveralls and boots.
- Do not allow people who own their own birds, or who have recently been in contact with other birds (e.g., visiting another flock or attending a bird show) near your birds. To reduce the risk of introducing diseases to your flock, ensure that people caring for your birds (staff or volunteers) do not have birds of their own or attend events where birds are present.
- Wear separate clothing and footwear when dealing with your birds. Keep them at the entrance to the structure or enclosure.
- Wash and disinfect boots and any equipment that comes in contact with the birds or their droppings, such as shovels, scoops and brooms. Clean cages, food and water surfaces daily.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after dealing with your birds.

Prevent contact with wild birds

Wild birds carry many diseases, including avian influenza. Minimizing contact with wild species and their droppings will help protect your birds from these diseases.

- Keep your birds in a screened-in area or preferably an enclosed structure where they do not have contact with wild birds. Screen all doors, windows and vents, and keep them in good repair.

- Do not use water that may be contaminated with wild bird droppings, such as pond water, for your birds. Test your water at least once a year and use appropriate water sanitation such as chlorine. Keep feed in a tightly sealed container, protected from wild birds.

Practice proper rodent control

Rats and mice can spread disease to your birds, spoil feed, cause property damage and kill chicks, poults and other young birds. Mice can enter an enclosure through a hole the size of your little finger, and rats through a hole the size of your thumb.

- Monitor your enclosure regularly for signs of rodents, such as droppings or chewed equipment. Mice will live in buildings once they gain entry, while rats live outside and enter looking for food.
- Clean up all garbage and debris surrounding your birds' enclosure, and keep tall grass and weeds mowed.
- Store feed in tightly sealed containers that a rodent cannot chew through, such as a steel garbage can with a tight-fitting lid or an old freezer.
- Place bait stations around the exterior of your poultry house to help control rodent populations.

Don't bring disease home

Mixing birds of different species and from different sources increases the risk of introducing disease to your flock. It is preferable to keep only birds of similar age and species together (all in/all out).

- If multiple ages and/or species are kept, minimize contact between groups by keeping them in separate locations.
- If new birds are added to your flock, make sure that you get their complete background information, including a history of any diseases and vaccinations. Some vaccines, including some of those used to control infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT), can cause disease in unvaccinated birds. Consult your veterinarian regarding proper vaccination procedures.
- Keep new or returning birds separate (quarantined) for at least 2-4 weeks after returning home, and monitor them for signs of illness. Clean and disinfect cages and equipment used for these birds. Use separate clothing, footwear and equipment for quarantined birds, and handle them last. If the same equipment and clothing must be used, clean and disinfect them before and after handling the birds.

- Avoid sharing equipment and supplies with other bird owners. If this cannot be avoided, clean and disinfect the equipment before and after each use.

Recognize and report any illness

Early detection is critical to successfully dealing with a disease outbreak.

- If your birds show signs of disease, such as depression, abnormal egg production or feed consumption, sneezing, gasping, a discharge from the nose or eyes, diarrhea or sudden death, call your local veterinarian immediately.
- Dispose of dead birds quickly using an approved method, such as burial or composting. Consult your veterinarian first, as he or she may wish to collect samples for laboratory diagnosis. Proper disposal methods and options can be found on the [OMAFRA](#) website.

Raising poultry species, either for food or as a hobby, is part of Ontario's agricultural heritage. However, to minimize the risks this poses to food safety and to the commercial poultry industry, bird owners should recognize and follow good biosecurity practices.

Resources

OMAFRA Factsheets:

Biosecurity: Health Protection and Sanitation Strategies for Cattle and General Guidelines for Other Livestock (Order No. 09-079)

Deadstock Disposal Options for On-Farm (Order No. 09-025)

Rodent Control in Livestock and Poultry Facilities (Order No. 10-077)

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