

Transport and Care of Poultry

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Having bought poultry from the sale yard or through a private sale, you need to ensure that you are prepared and able to provide adequate transport to your property. It is important that you are capable of caring for your new poultry and providing adequate protection from disease and predators. This fact sheet provides some basic information regarding your obligation as an owner of poultry.

Poultry being transported are subject to stress. Stress may arise from catching or handling, food and water deprivation, exposure to high velocity air movement or loud noises. When selecting poultry for travel, you must ensure that only healthy birds are selected. Sick, injured or weak birds should not be transported.



Poultry fit for transport should be carefully loaded into clean cages or crates. The minimum cage and crate dimensions are 8 inches wide, 12 inches deep, and 10 inches tall per bird. Cages or crates should be well ventilated and of sufficient height to allow the bird to stand.

Cages or crates should have rigid floors and be designed in order to prevent any part of the bird from protruding during travel. Sharp edges, hinges or latches should not project into the cage. Locking mechanisms, to prevent the birds from escaping during transportation, should be fitted.

Catching and handling birds can be very stressful for the bird, as well as for you. Injury during catching and handling can be severe. Prior to picking up the bird, the door to each cage or crate should be opened and the crate placed nearby. Each individual bird should be picked up by grasping both legs with one hand and holding both wings with the other hand to prevent them from hitting harmful objects. After picking up the bird, it should be placed into its transport cage or crate immediately.

Cages or crates should be transported in an upright position to protect the birds from the wind, dangerous temperatures, and inclement weather. Transportation with no access to water and feed must not exceed 8 hours, and birds should be monitored regularly throughout the journey.

- Carry poultry by their head, neck, wings or tail.
- Transport birds in bags.
- Transport birds with their legs tied.
- Transport birds in the trunk of a car.
- Mix mature males or different species of poultry in a single crate or cage during transport.

Before you transport your poultry to your property, it is important to make sure you have adequate facilities to house them. Unloading should occur as soon as possible upon arrival to your destination. Poultry should be handled with care while unloading and should be carried out as previously described. In general, pick the birds up by their legs while preventing their wings from striking solid objects. Thoroughly inspect your birds to ensure they have not sustained any type of injury during handling or transportation.

Unload poultry into an enclosed pen or cage which has direct access to fresh water and feed. Poultry purchased at sale yards have often been without food (and possibly water) for more than 8 hours. Whether you are purchasing pigeons, guinea fowl, chickens, ducks, turkeys, or geese, cages or pens should have an area that will provide protection from inclement weather and from predators. Adequate ventilation is also essential.

Adequate space per bird is important, regardless of the type of poultry that you have purchased. In general, about 0.25 square feet should be used per pound of weight. This will vary depending on if birds are housed in cages or pens and the type of birds that you have, e.g. fancy chickens versus meat chickens. Wood shavings or straw can be used as bedding or in nesting boxes.

Allowing poultry access to the yard or open paddocks may be desirable, but they are at considerable risk from predators, including dogs. Although most poultry will eat insects when allowed open access, geese will graze the grass. Also, you need to keep in mind that the poultry may defecate in undesirable locations and eat garden vegetables.

Feed and water requirements:

Poultry require access to clean and fresh drinking water at all times. It is essential that watering containers be cleaned regularly and an adequate supply must be maintained. Inspection of poultry and their housing facilities should be done at least once each day. Watering containers and feeders designed specifically for poultry are available at your local grain or produce store.



In general, a “table scrap” diet does not meet the nutritional demands of poultry and particularly of growing birds or layers. Common deficiencies include calcium, phosphorous and vitamin D (resulting in poor bone growth and rickets), energy (poor growth, weight loss, or poor egg production) and vitamin A (poor skin and feathering).

Formulated diets are available for all poultry species and stages of a bird’s life (starter, grower and layer), and should be used as the sole source for balanced nutrition. Consult your feed store or local veterinarian to determine the most appropriate feed type and diet for your birds.

Assessment of the health of the poultry:

Similar to other species, backyard poultry are susceptible to disease. If you suspect that your birds have one or more of these diseases, you should consult a veterinarian. The spreading of undiagnosed diseases may cause major damage to the United States commercial poultry industry and may also place your family and community at risk.



Please remember that poultry require ongoing maintenance and supervision to remain healthy!

Table 1. Common diseases of poultry.

Disease:	Description:

External parasites	Poultry can carry a large variety of parasites on their bodies. External parasites generally cause mild clinical signs, such as feather damage, anemia and irritation. However, they may also carry severe, life threatening diseases, such as tick fever. Poultry should be examined regularly and treated for external parasites every 2 to 3 months. Products to treat this disease can be recommended by your veterinarian.
Internal parasites	Along with external parasites, poultry can also carry a wide range of internal parasites. Signs of internal parasitism may include weight loss, pale combs or diarrhea. Your local veterinarian will be able to examine the feces and advise the proper treatment.
Marek's disease	Marek's disease is a viral infection that only affects poultry. The virus is transferred from bird to bird through feather dander and dust. It is able to live in the environment for a considerably long period of time and may also be spread between properties by human transfer. Birds usually become infected at a young age but may not show signs of the disease until months later. The disease may cause transitional neurological signs. In later stages, birds may also develop tumors in and on their bodies. As they grow, the tumors may cause a number of things to occur, such as weight loss, diarrhea, ill thrift and difficulty breathing. It is preferable to purchase poultry that were vaccinated at the age of one day old to prevent this disease.
Leucosis	Avian leucosis is also a viral disease that only affects poultry. It is capable of causing tumors and cancer. These tumors usually appear in older birds (6 months of age or older). It causes listlessness, weight loss and unfortunately, the infected bird will eventually die.
Respiratory disease	There are many causes of respiratory disease in poultry. Respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, and discharge from the eyes and nostrils can be caused by parasites, dust, high ammonia levels or a variety of bacteria or viruses, including <i>Mycoplasma gallisepticum</i> , Newcastle Disease Virus and Avian Influenza Virus. If you notice that your birds are developing such symptoms, contact your local veterinarian immediately.
Coccidiosis	Coccidiosis is one of the most common and costly diseases that affect poultry housed on litter in high densities. It causes droopiness and paleness of the comb, diarrhea and occasionally blood in the feces. The death rate of infected birds may be quite high, both in younger and older birds. To reduce the risk of spreading this disease, keep bedding dry at all times. Vaccines are also available for prevention, as are a wide selection of coccidiostats for treatment of the disease. If you notice that your birds are developing these symptoms, consult your local veterinarian immediately.

For more information, please contact:

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