

LARGE ANIMAL VETERINARY SERVICES

CHICKEN - PREVENTATIVE HEALTH CARE RECOMMENDATIONS

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Acquiring New Birds

- Most chicks purchased through hatcheries are vaccinated against Marek's and Pullorum
- Most older birds that are purchased are not vaccinated
- New birds should be quarantined for a minimum of 2 weeks away from the other birds to make sure the new bird(s) don't show any signs of disease, particularly respiratory or bowel issues
- New birds should be introduced at night to prevent pecking and ganging up on new birds

Housing

- Chickens are sensitive to both heat and cold. Therefore birds need access to a warm, dry, direct draft-free house in the winter and access to shade in the summer.
- Ventilation is important but shouldn't be a direct draft on the birds in colder months, particularly where they roost
- Chicken pens and houses should be animal-proofed and birds allowed to free range should be trained to roost inside at night where they can be closed in to reduce incidence of predation
- Pens and areas should be kept clean and dry at all times as damp environments promotes bacteria such as Salmonella which is not only harmful to chickens but to humans as well. For this reason good personal hygiene such as hand washing should always be maintained after handling chickens, pens and eggs.

Nutrition

- Commercially available pellets, mash or crumbles are formulated to meet the requirements of different life stages (chick, grower and layer) and should comprise at least 90% of their diet.
- Up to 10% of diet can be supplemented with greens, kitchen waste, weeds, plants or mealworms.
- Medicated feeds should be avoided as these substances can accumulate in eggs when used and may require discarding of eggs
- Oyster shells and/or grit should be provided free choice at all times to promote healthy eggs and shell durability.

Parasites

- Chickens are prone to both internal and external parasites so housing areas should be kept clean and dry to help prevent infestations
- Ideally birds are examined once annually to monitor any parasite loads on the birds externally as well as any intestinal loads internally as determined by fecal examination
- Deworming products and protocols are determined on an individual herd basis based on individual or flock examination

Veterinary Care

- Most medical problems can be avoided by good husbandry and following the guidelines listed above as well as paying close attention to birds
- Annual examination of birds is recommended, even if only one bird from the flock is examined it can be indicative of any potential problems in the flock
- Sick birds can mask problems as to prevent others from picking on it. Commonly seen problems include weight loss, diarrhea, loss of appetite, ruffled up feathers and difficulty breathing
- It is best to prevent these problems than to treat them so plan to schedule a yearly exam for increased health and productivity in your flock!