



Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Small Flock Poultry: Raising Healthy Birds

Many people in Ontario own small flocks of poultry, such as backyard chickens or other birds raised for meat and/or eggs, hobby birds, show/ornamental birds, sport birds and pet birds.

Learning how to care for your birds is critical to their health and well-being. Disease prevention is one of the most important ways that you can help your birds.

Preventing and spotting disease

[Avian influenza](#) and other diseases are an ongoing concern for the entire poultry industry, and the risk of disease transmission and outbreak is constantly present. As a small flock owner, it is important for you to use biosecurity measures to keep your birds healthy and to help stop the spread of disease. Biosecurity can be as simple as:

- Learning how to spot the signs of disease.
- Keeping barns, cages, egg trays, feed and water dishes and all other equipment clean and disinfected.
- Separating new and returning birds from your other birds until you are sure they are disease-free.
- [Keeping wild birds and other animals away from your birds](#), and away from your birds' feed and drinking water. Wild migratory birds can carry disease and are a big risk to your birds.

If you think a serious disease is present you should discuss it with your veterinarian, the Canada Food Inspection Agency or the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Reporting a disease will help authorities track diseases and help protect the whole poultry population.

Help stop the spread of disease

As a bird owner, you can help stop the spread of disease to other birds. Here are some ways you can do that:

- Don't transport birds showing signs of disease.
- Have dedicated clothing and footwear meant only for being around your birds, and wear these clothes when you tend your flock.

- Don't take diseased birds to auctions, shows or fairs, or to any other place with other birds.
- Don't transport birds across provincial boundaries if they might be sick and/or when disease events are reported in Ontario.
- Print the "Is Your Bird Sick" [postcard](#) or the "Stop! Is Your Bird Showing Signs of Disease" [poster](#) and share at your next meeting or event.

Keep learning

There are lots of resources that can teach you how to keep your birds healthy and disease-free.

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) resources

- The [Biosecurity Recommendations for Small Flock Poultry Owners](#) and [Biosecurity for Poultry Shows](#) factsheets have great information for keeping your flock healthy both at home and when around other birds.
- The [Biosecurity for Small Poultry Flocks During High Risk Periods for Avian Influenza](#) factsheet specifically focuses on biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of avian influenza in your flock.
- [Transport Guidelines for Small Flock Poultry Owners](#) factsheet can help you lower the amount of stress your birds feel during transportation.
- The [Basic Husbandry for Commercial Layers](#) factsheet gives some basic information needed to set up a good living environment.
- Visit our [Livestock](#) web page for more information about poultry housing, nutrition, fly control and other ways to raise healthy and productive birds.

Other resources

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's [Bird Health Basics](#) series has great information on preventing and detecting disease in small flocks. [Their video](#) is full of easy disease prevention tactics.
- The [Poultry Industry Council](#) has small flock resources, courses and newsletters.
- The [Ontario Animal Health Network](#) is a great resource for non-poultry veterinarians.
- Mississippi State University's [Small Flock Management](#) web page has information on managing your flock well to prevent serious health and production issues.
- Manitoba Agriculture's [Small Flock Poultry](#) web page provides feed, nutrition, flock management and biosecurity information.

For more information:

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