

Pet Poultry Basics

Marcie Logsdon, DVM

I. [Determine your clinical approach](#)

- A. Flock health management
- B. Individualized companion animal care

II. Laws and regulations governing backyard poultry in the U.S.

- A. Approved medications
- B. <https://lafeber.com/vet/backyard-poultry-primer-2/> - MDRB (ELDU)
- C. Food Animal Residue Avoidance Databank ([FARAD](#)), a USDA program
- D. Medications prohibited for ELDU in major food-animal species in the U.S.

include:

- 1. Fluoroquinolones
- 2. Nitroimidazoles
- 3. Deslorelin implants

III. Common disorders

A. [Reproductive tract disease](#)

- 1. The most common cause backyard chickens present for care
- 2. Commercial chicken breeds have been selected for high egg production
- 3. Often present for difficulty in breathing or crop stasis due to compression of the air sacs and/or gastrointestinal tract

4. Common conditions
 - a. Egg binding (most common in young pullets)
 - b. Cloacal prolapse
 - c. Salpingitis
 - d. Neoplasia of the ovary or oviduct
 - e. Egg yolk peritonitis
5. Salpingohysterectomy

B. Marek's disease

1. Widespread among poultry in the U.S.
2. A reportable disease in some states
3. Caused by an oncogenic herpesvirus
4. Transmission
 - a. Shed in feather dust
 - b. Horizontal (not vertical) transmission
2. Clinical picture
 - a. Classic presentation is unilateral leg lameness in a young bird (i.e., <1y old) that does not respond to pain management and rest
 - b. Lymphoma in older birds
 - c. Motility dysfunction of the GI tract.
3. Definitive diagnostics is based on histologic evaluation of section of the sciatic nerve obtained via necropsy or biopsy
4. Prevention

- a. Acquire only vaccinated chicks
- b. Quarantine vaccinated chicks for at least 7 days before exposure

C. Heavy metal toxic exposure

1. Common in free-ranging poultry
2. Usually zinc toxicity, but lead toxicity is possible
3. Consume galvanized materials (washers, bolts, nails, scrap wire) or pennies while searching for grit
4. Treatment of choice
 - a. Chelation therapy
 - b. +/- caudal sac ventriculotomy is the recommended

D. Trauma

1. Domestic predator attacks (dogs)
 - a. Limb fractures are a common sequela
 - b. Assess carefully for puncture wounds and internal trauma
 - c. Treatment is similar to other avian species
 - d. Pin placement can be difficult in reproductively active hens (polyostotic hyperostosis)
2. Degloving injuries are commonly caused by wild predator attacks (e.g., raccoons, raptors).

E. Nutritional disorders

1. Best prevented by providing a crumble or pellet appropriate for the life stage as the primary diet
 - a. Boutique diets often lead to malnutrition
 - b. Ensure the diet contains niacin if waterfowl are present in the flock
2. Supplement with vegetables and fruits, pasture for grazing, and insects

IV. Biosecurity risk for backyard flocks

A. Reportable diseases

B. Index for suspicion of a contagious disease increases with...

1. Exposure to wild birds or other flocks
2. Illness in more than one bird

C. Consult with state veterinary officers when...

1. Multiple birds are affected
2. Respiratory or neurologic disease with no obvious non-infectious cause