

Backyard or Urban Poultry Keeping Concerns

Several common concerns have been expressed by town and city governments when they are asked to consider the request to keep poultry in urban settings. The purpose of this letter is to provide information regarding these concerns which typically include transmission of diseases from poultry to humans as well as nuisance concerns of noise, odor, and pests; generation and disposal of waste.

Poultry Diseases and Transmission to Humans

The main diseases of concern include salmonellosis, campylobacteriosis, chlamydophilosis (also known as psittacosis), and avian influenza. Illness associated with salmonella and campylobacter is typically the result of eating contaminated food which has been improperly cooked or prepared. Salmonella and Campylobacter can exist in the gut of the bird and hence contact with the fecal material is a concern; however, neither is present in the gut of most poultry. There are sporadic reports of children contracting Salmonella by handling baby chicks. People, especially children should wash their hands before and after handling poultry to prevent transmission in either direction. Chlamydophilosis or psittacosis is rarely diagnosed in domestic poultry, usually turkeys or pigeons, and is generally not a disease of chickens. Most cases of Chlamydophila infection are diagnosed in psittacine bird (parrots, etc.) and only on rare occasion. Contact with respiratory secretions or fecal material of sick birds can spread the disease. Avian Influenza is a respiratory disease in birds and there are many different subtypes of influenza virus. Most subtypes are not transmitted to humans (zoonotic). One subtype, occurring in Europe and the Far East, can be transmitted from birds to humans. This subtype has never been diagnosed in the United States, but there are both national and state programs to regularly monitor U.S. poultry and wild birds for the presence of this subtype.

Parasites of poultry must live on or inside birds to survive and do not infect people. External parasites that can infest poultry are not infectious for people. Common external parasites such as the northern fowl mite strictly live on birds and are not infectious for people. Intestinal parasites, such as coccidia and roundworms, can live in the digestive tract of poultry, but do not infect humans, dogs or cats.

Nuisance Concerns

These concerns include noise, manure, odor, and pests. For noise, male (rooster) and female (hen) chickens vary in their vocalizations. Mature roosters will crow while hens make a clucking noise. The clucking tends to be soft in tone but the hens can have a loud call-alarm call if startled or threatened. These calls occur over a short time period and end when the threat ends or is identified. Typically there will be little vocalization during the night time hours unless the birds are startled.

Odor can be associated with chicken manure if allowed to accumulate. A small number of birds will not generate much manure and with periodic cleaning of the coop this should not be an issue. The manure and bedding that is removed can be used as a fertilizer in the fresh form or after composting. Because the birds produce manure, there is the concern that flies will be attracted and proliferate in the manure. Wet feed can also attract flies. Proper coop

management, maintaining dry bedding and removing soiled bedding and wet feed from the coop should minimize the fly population in a small flock. Proper coop management will also minimize potential problems with rodents such as house mice and Norway rats. Larger pests/predators, such as foxes, raccoons, and coyotes that already reside in urban areas may take an occasional chicken but the small populations of poultry kept in any one area are unlikely to attract and sustain any number of predators.

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Additional information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.poultryu.umn.edu/>

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/food/small-farms/livestock/poultry/>

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/food/food-safety/sanitation/>

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