

CHICKEN ILLNESS & SYMPTOMS CHART

Know what to watch for so you can act early.



FLOCK HEALTH



Even the best-kept flocks can get under the weather from time to time.

This quick-reference chart helps you spot early signs of illness so you can care, isolate if needed, and get your chickens back to feeling their best.

Trust your instincts. You know your flock's normal behavior better than anyone.

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BEHAVIOR & APPEARANCE CHANGES

Symptom	Possible Concern	Notes / What to Watch
Lethargy, fluffed feathers	General illness, respiratory infection, parasites, cold	Chickens that isolate themselves or look “puffed up” are often unwell.
Loss of appetite	Many illnesses like Marek’s disease or stress	Check water, offer treats, and watch for other signs.
Pale comb or wattles	Anemia, mites, worms, Marek’s disease, poor nutrition	Healthy combs are bright red in adults, pale can signal low blood flow or nutrient deficiency.
Black or bluish comb or wattles	Circulation or oxygen issues, water belly, frostbite	Can indicate heart/lung problems or cold damage. Ensure good airflow and monitor warmth.
Holding head or neck twisted (wry neck)	Vitamin E deficiency, head injury, neurological issue	Offer vitamin E + selenium supplement; isolate if struggling to eat.

Chickens are masters at hiding illness; it’s part of their survival instinct.

BEHAVIOR & APPEARANCE CHANGES

Symptom	Possible Concern	Notes / What to Watch
Weight loss	Worms, Marek's disease, or chronic illness	Check droppings for worms and monitor for other symptoms.
Feather loss	Molting, stress, bullying, parasites	Molting is normal yearly; missing feathers outside molt may mean mites, lice, or pecking.
Hunched posture or tail down	Egg binding, vent gleet, internal laying, pain	Check vent and watch for straining or decreased activity.
Limping or unsteady walking	Bumblefoot, injury, deficiency	Check feet and legs for swelling or cuts.
Lack of coordination or paralysis	Vitamin deficiency, injury, Marek's disease	Look for trouble standing, stumbling, or dragging legs; isolate bird and offer vitamin supplement immediately.
Constant preening or shaking	External parasites, mites, lice	Check under wings and around vent for crawling insects or eggs.

RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS

Symptom	Possible Concern	Notes / What to Watch
Sneezing, coughing	Dust, ammonia buildup, respiratory infection, bird flu	Check coop ventilation; clean bedding regularly.
Wheezing or gurgling sounds	Respiratory disease, (e.g., Mycoplasma, Infectious Bronchitis), bird flu	May need vet attention; isolate affected birds. Look down throat for blockages.
Discharge from eyes or nostrils	Sinus infection, respiratory disease, bird flu	Clean eyes gently; watch for swelling or bubbles in eyes.
Swollen face or eyes	Respiratory infection, allergic reaction, bird flu	Often paired with nasal discharge or labored breathing.
Labored breathing or open-mouth breathing	Heat stress, respiratory illness, gapeworm, bird flu	Look for gasping or head shaking (a sign of gapeworm).

If several hens develop breathing issues, isolate them and consult a poultry vet. Some respiratory diseases can linger in your flock long-term.

DROPPINGS & DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Symptom	Possible Concern	Notes / What to Watch
Watery or foamy droppings	Coccidiosis, heat stress, diet change	Watch for blood in stool or lethargy.
Bloody droppings	Coccidiosis or intestinal parasites	Urgent! Separate bird and contact a poultry vet.
Green droppings	Bile from lack of food intake (sick hen)	Could be fasting or infection-related.
Worms visible in droppings	Internal parasites	Deworm: consult vet for correct product.
White, pasty vent	Vent gleet, yeast infection	Gently clean area; check vent for swelling or discharge. Add probiotics or ACV to their water.

You'll learn to recognize what's "normal" for your flock. Trust your daily observations more than one weird dropping.

EGG LAYING & REPRODUCTIVE SIGNS

Symptom	Possible Concern	Notes / What to Watch
No eggs from active layers	Molt, stress, illness, broody, winter, nutrition	Natural pauses happen, but monitor for prolonged stops.
Misshapen or soft-shelled eggs	Calcium imbalance, early laying, illness	Offer oyster shell and check feed quality.
Straining, sitting in nest box	Egg binding, broody	Check for egg stuck in vent area. If broody, gently break broodiness if you're not hatching chicks.
Discharge or foul odor from vent	Vent gleet or infection	Isolate and clean; seek vet help if persistent.
Swollen or red vent	Vent prolapse or infection	Look for tissue protruding or hens pecking at the area, separate and treat immediately.

Healthy hens should have bright eyes, clean vents, and steady energy. Watch for small changes, and you'll catch issues early.

CARING FOR YOUR FLOCK WITH CONFIDENCE

Raising chickens is a journey of observation, patience, and connection. The more time you spend with your flock, the easier it becomes to notice what's normal and what's not.

Remember: you don't need to know everything. Just start by paying attention, staying consistent, and trusting that gentle intuition that every chicken keeper develops.

WHEN TO CALL FOR HELP

If you notice symptoms that persist, worsen, or affect multiple birds, don't wait to reach out for help. A poultry veterinarian or local extension office can provide accurate diagnosis and treatment options.

Pro tip: Keep a "flock health notebook" to jot down symptoms, treatments, and outcomes. It can help you spot patterns and track what works best for your birds.

This guide is for educational and informational purposes only and is not an exhaustive list of symptoms or treatments. It reflects personal experience and research from backyard chicken keeping. Always consult a licensed poultry veterinarian for medical concerns or before beginning any treatment.

HELPFUL REMINDERS

✅ Observe your flock daily as small changes matter.

✅ Keep their environment clean, dry, and well-ventilated.

✅ Offer balanced nutrition and fresh water.

✅ Quarantine new birds before adding them to your flock.

✅ Don’t panic: most issues are treatable when caught early.

Thank you for taking the time to care deeply for your flock and for choosing mindful, heart-centered chicken keeping. Your love and attention make all the difference. ❤️