

Quarantine and Isolation Procedures for Pastured Poultry

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Why have a quarantine and isolation plan?

Even in a pastured poultry operation, it is very important to follow biosecurity practices to ensure the health of your investment. It is a given that raising poultry on pasture is more costly and labor intensive than conventional poultry production systems. Additionally, biosecurity is often at the forefront of the farmer's mind given the exposure the flock has to potential sources of disease. This is why it is recommended that you use an all-in, all-out approach to management. By using this approach, you can avoid the intricacies of quarantine and isolation.

If you still need to introduce new birds to your farm, then plan which coop or pen they are going to be placed in during isolation.

- Do you have enough pen space?
- In what pasture can you place them? Do you have spare equipment (waters and drinkers) for the new birds?
- Is it worth the risk to your existing flock?

All these questions should be answered when attempting to buy new birds. If you thought of all possible questions, and are willing to take the risk, then **here are some tips for quarantining the new birds:**

When do I quarantine and isolate birds?

New Chickens

One practice is to avoid introducing new chickens to your new flock without first isolating and quarantining the new birds. Ideally, it is best to have birds of the same age in a flock in order to avoid transmitting diseases from older to younger birds. If possible, when introducing new birds, try to ensure they are of the same age and have had the same vaccinations as your flock. Doing so will prevent spreading diseases and it will help maintain a healthy flock since overall health is the ultimate goal.

Remember, a bird can look healthy and still be sick. If you decide to acquire the new chicken(s), it is crucial to follow quarantine and isolation procedures. The first step before bringing a new bird home is to assess its health; see if it is alert and does not appear sick. Always try to buy from a reputable breeder. Since the moment you bring new birds onto

the farm premises they should never come in contact with the existing flock.

Sick or Injured Chickens

No matter how hard you try, eventually you will find that a member of your flock is sick or injured. Whether it is egg bound, attacked by a predator, or has a cough, you will need to place this bird in isolation until it is well. Taking the time to set up a quarantine pen prior to an incident will reduce your stress. It may mean that the majority of the time it sits empty, taking up space; but when it is needed, you will find it extremely helpful. A quarantine pen should meet the needs of the bird in both space, and access to food and water. An injured or sick bird may not want to move once you have found it, but should it recover, you will need to allow it enough space to move around. An injured bird will need space to stretch and regain its strength. If you have two or more injured birds, you may choose to place them in the same container, but sometimes it is better to separate the birds depending on the type of injury or symptoms. It is not recommended that a sick bird share the same quarantine space with an injured bird as the sick bird may infect the injured bird. Keep in mind that a sick bird may need to be treated, therefore making it ineligible for organic certification or another form of certification that you may have on your farm. What will you do with a bird that can no longer be sold or the eggs processed along with the rest of your flock? Think about these things in advance and work with your extension agent or extension poultry specialist to draft a plan of action for this type of circumstance.

What do I need to think about when setting up a quarantine space?

Quarantine your chickens in a separate area where there is low foot and vehicle traffic. This will reduce your risk of spreading diseases. In essence, you are setting up another coop, albeit smaller and out of the way. The question is not *if* you will need a quarantine space, but rather *when*. Sickness and injuries never occur at a convenient time, so eliminate stress by planning ahead. No matter your farm size, you can separate your new birds as far away as possible from your current pastured flock. If you have several acres, then try to place them in different pastures on the farm. If possible, separate them at least 1 mile apart. However, if your space is limited, try to be creative and do your

best to place them as far away as possible. If your space is limited, aim for a minimum recommended distance of 30 ft. (but only if your space is severely restricted, otherwise more space will help ensure that your flocks do not cross-contaminate one another).

If brooding chicks use the space of your home, keep them as far from your pastured flock as possible. Use a spare bathroom, a basement, or a secluded area in a barn as far from your pastured flock as possible. Remember, it is not a good idea to introduce new birds to your farming operation in an all-in, all-out system, so use space carefully. Distance is crucial since pathogens can travel by air, making location a key factor in your biosecurity planning.

New birds should have their own equipment. Waterers, shovels, feeders, clothing, and shoes should be separate for your birds in quarantine. Do not wear the same pair of shoes or clothes for your current flock as you do with your quarantined flock. Always clean the quarantine area last. To avoid any confusion, mark and label all the equipment used in the quarantine pen and, if necessary, place labels on the equipment and the quarantine pen itself. Do not allow visitors to come in contact with your flock, especially birds in quarantine, as this is a potential biosecurity hazard.

Birds should be quarantined for a minimum of three weeks before being introduced into your flock. If they develop any illness, they should be diagnosed and treated before introducing them into the pasture community. Observation is vital to achieve the best care for your birds. If you are not completely sure about a bird, or if its health is questionable, then give it more time in the quarantine area.

What to do if a bird dies?

Sometimes deaths occur. Whether a bird dies in quarantine or you find it out with the rest of the flock, there are certain steps you need to take to gather the most information about the situation. First, was the bird attacked by a predator? Sometimes predators kill more than one bird at a time making the diagnosis of the problem easy. Look at the type of injuries on the birds, taking care to wear gloves when you do so. You do not want to be injured by poking yourself with a broken bone in case the predator was sick. Look for footprints, scat, and points of entry such as a hole dug under a fence.

If a bird dies suddenly, due to illness, you will need to bag the carcass and take it to the diagnostic lab. To do this properly, use a can of Lysol, a roll of paper towels, and 3 trash bags. First, take a trash bag with

you out to the sick chicken and place the chicken in the trash bag, tie it closed, and spray the outside of the bag thoroughly with Lysol. Wipe the bag down with the paper towels. Take the now full bag to the entrance of the pen, barn, or pasture and place it in the second trash bag that you have waiting. Tie the second trash bag and spray it with Lysol. Wipe it down thoroughly. Now proceed to the house or wherever you have a waiting refrigerator. Never place a carcass in the freezer as it destroys the cells that the diagnostic lab needs to see for a diagnosis. Place the chicken into the third trash bag just before you place it in the refrigerator. Tie the bag and spray it with Lysol. Wipe the bag down and place it in the refrigerator. Using this triple-bag and wipe-down system will prevent organisms from contaminating your refrigerator. The carcass should wait in the refrigerator no more than 36 hours before being taken or sent to the nearest diagnostic lab. Transport the carcass in a cooler, if possible with ice or ice packs to keep it cool. Clean out your cooler with the Lysol, allowing it to dry thoroughly before placing it back into storage. Keep the telephone number and address of your local diagnostic lab, with directions from your home, in with your poultry records.

Summary

Being meticulous and careful about your chickens is a good habit that inevitably helps to keep up a healthy disease-free flock. Thinking about these details ahead of time reduces the chances of a mistake down the road. An all-in, all-out system will help you reduce the risk of disease on your pastured poultry farm. However, if you need to bring in new birds, use distance as your ally. Be prepared with a quarantine area regardless of whether you use an all-in, all-out system because sickness or injuries will still require the use of the isolated area. With all of these plans and preparations, your flock will benefit from your steps aimed at ensuring both their health and their welfare.

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