

## BACKYARD CHICKENS IN THE CONSULT ROOM

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In recent years clients are arriving with their chickens and but their expectations have changed - they are wanting them treated as pets rather than as production animals. This means you cannot use common poultry techniques for diagnosis, such as slaughter and post-mortem.

The aim of this short presentation is to give you some tips on what I have found help me deal with this kind of patient.

### Common Breeds

Clients often know the breed of their chickens and they become disappointed if you do not. They feel they know the breed so they know more than you. This embarrassing situation is simply avoided by the receptionist or nurse asking the question and recording the breed on your file.

The common breeds that were the basis of many of the common backyard birds and the poultry industry in Australia are: Australorp and the White Leghorn.

There are many other commonly encountered Show Poultry breeds such as : Silkie Bantam; White Sussex; Araucana, Ancona; Pekin (the true bantam); ISA Brown; Australian Game; Cochin; Barnevelder; White Polish; Minorca; Rhode Island Red and New Hampshire.

### Some Quick Facts

- Many Backyard chickens live approximately 8-10 years
- They have only three good productive years
- 70% of the cost of raising chickens is spent on feed
- In monogastric animals, like chickens, energy comes mainly from carbohydrates and fats since fibre containing cellulose cannot be digested
- White eggs are laid by chickens with white ear lobes, while brown eggs are laid by chickens with red ear lobes.

### Avian Genetics

- Mammals: Male XY + Female XX, Males determine sex of offspring
- Birds: Male ZZ + Female ZW Females determine sex of offspring

## Vent Sexing Young Poultry

Vent sexing was developed by a Japanese professor, Kiyoshi Masui. This procedure involves holding the day-old chick upside in one hand and while visually examining the vent area for the presence or absence of a rudimentary male sex organ. Trained, non-professionals typically 60-70% accuracy. Professionals typically have 95% accuracy

VISUAL SEXING YOUNG POULTRY: Best way to tell is to wait till they grow up.

Compare the following to determine gender: Size and shape of tail feathers, comb, wattles and spurs.

## Some Legal Considerations

Backyard Chickens may be considered pets by their owners but legally they are also considered to be production animals (meat and eggs) so medications that are dispensed by the veterinary profession are subject to withholding times.

The main concern is over the withholding period for eggs. The following drugs can be used in egg-producing chickens with noted withhold periods:

Class	Medication	Withholding Period
Antibiotics	Amoxicillin	1-7 days
	Ampicillin injectable	15 days
	Sulphadimidine	10 days
	Trimethoprim/Sulfa	10 days
	Chlortetracycline	7 days
	Tylosin	0 days
Coccidia treatments	Toltrazuril	0 days
	Dimetridazole	5 days
	Sulfaquinoxaline	14 days
	Amprolium + Ethopabate	0 days
Parasiticide	Levamisole	7 days
	Rotenone	1 day

NSW Department of Primary Industries has a brochure written by Dr Lee Cook on withholding periods in eggs at [http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/440096/Advice-for-veterinarians-on-drug-use-and-withholding-periods-in-backyard-poultry.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/440096/Advice-for-veterinarians-on-drug-use-and-withholding-periods-in-backyard-poultry.pdf)

It states: The following are the only veterinary chemicals with MRLs (Maximum Residue Limits) set in eggs: amoxicillin, amprolium, bacitracin, chlortetracycline, cyromazine, kitasamycin, lasalocid, levamisole, lincomycin, neomycin, salinomycin, spectinomycin, sulfadimidine, sulphadiazine, sulfaquinoxaline, toltrazuril, trichlorfon,

tylosin, and virginiamycin. Note that many pesticides have MRLs in eggs, based on transfer via treated feeds, and these could be taken into consideration when pesticide treatments of birds are required.

## Housing Considerations

- Shelter from predators and weather extremes.
- Substrate/floor drainage
- Good ventilation
- Avoid overcrowding

## Feeding

The food offered must meet the requirements of the different life stages as developed for the Poultry industry:

Life Stage	Age	Ration
Egg Layer	Day 1 to 6 weeks	Starter
	7-18 weeks	Grower
	19-70 weeks	Layer
Broiler (Meat)	Day 1 to 3 weeks	Starter
	4-7 weeks	Finisher

Medicated chick starters often contain amprolium, which is a thiamine-binding coccidiostat, so it may cause Vit B1 deficiency – Star gazing

Feeding Commercial pellets is recommended as the basis for a diet. Clients may feed some bizarre diets such as tofu or other human foods thinking it is healthy for the chickens. Always ask for the diet that the chickens are fed and all details of components and quantities. Many diseases are exacerbated by dietary deficiencies.

**If home grain or other feed is provided begin at day 8 in broilers and day 15 in layers.**

- Replace 5% of commercial ration with whole grain or other feeds Increase to a maximum of 50% slowly
  - ▶ 5% a week in broilers
  - ▶ 5% every 14 days in Layers
- commercial pellets are diluted with whole or ground grain or alternate feed stuffs.

### When grain is fed

- supply insoluble grit sprinkled on the feed at least once per week
- Beware overfeeding grit.

**A “Balanced” diet is usually fed to backyard chickens and easily accessible to the client is a mixture of**

- Layer Pellets

- Green Pick
- Household scraps
- Grains in small volumes (Wheat, Barley, Cracked corn, Oats etc.)

## Vaccinations

The poultry industry use selected vaccinations depending on the status of the flock as they monitor. There are many different pathogens that can be part of a poultry vaccination program. Vaccinations for backyard pigeons as described in the table below (taken from the Pfizer website) are probably not a realistic option for most backyard chickens and their owners.

AGE	RECOMMENDED
One Day-old	Marek's disease; Live Newcastle disease *
1st week	IB Armidale A3 strain
2 weeks	Fowl pox; ILT A20 ♦
3 weeks	Live Newcastle disease *
4 weeks	
5 weeks	IB Vic S strain
8 weeks	Fowl pox
9-10 weeks	ILT SA2 or ILT A20
11-12 weeks	IB Vic S strain
14-16 weeks	Live Newcastle disease * (Replacement birds)
Production	IB Vic S strain (Every 8 weeks)

- ♦ Note: Do not vaccinate with IB and ILT vaccines simultaneously. Ideally there should be at least a 1-week gap between vaccinations - a minimum gap of 7 days.
- \* Newcastle disease vaccination program complies with industry Standard Operating Procedures for vaccination against Newcastle disease (SOP's) for long-lived birds housed on the floor. A panel comprised of industry and government representatives devised these procedures. To obtain a copy of these SOP's please contact your state Department of Agriculture

If you require further information regarding vaccines, please contact:

Pfizer Animal Health Technical Services Department.  
 Pfizer Australia Pty Limited ABN 50 008 422 348  
 Animal Health, 38-42 Wharf Road, West Ryde, NSW 2114, Australia  
 Phone 1800 814 883

## Chicken Vaccine Guidelines

- All live vaccines should be used immediately after reconstitution with the appropriate diluent.
- Most live viral vaccines will only hold their full potency for about 2 hours.
- Discarded vials should immediately be placed in a designated and appropriately labelled "biologicals" container. If this option is not available, bury the vial below 500 mm in a disposal

pit specifically marked and set up for this purpose clear of waterways, desirable vegetation and roots.

- NEVER use disinfectant of any kind near vaccination equipment. Be totally clean but do not use disinfectants on the skin before vaccinating against fowl pox or Marek's disease

Use disposable syringes capable of precise measuring the small dose required for vaccination and disposable needles where possible. Instruct clients that insist on using reusable equipment should be sterilised. Always rinse equipment with sterile distilled water after cleaning.