

Transport Guidelines for Small Flock Poultry Owners

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Factsheet

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INTRODUCTION

This factsheet will discuss key points to minimize stress and to improve transport for small flock poultry. Transporting is one of the most stressful periods in an animal's life. It is important to have an understanding of the process when poultry need to be transported to a licensed slaughter plant for inspection and processing. This ensures proper transport can be arranged and that legislation governing the transport of all animals in Canada can be followed. This legislation is meant to ensure animals do not suffer unduly during transport. Codes of practice for poultry (meat birds, layers and transport) are available that provide more information on bird welfare. For the most current codes of practice visit the National Farm Animal Care Council website at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation of poultry is stressful and requires proper planning. Humane transport means that stressors are minimized or reduced to acceptable levels. Transport modules and crates must be appropriately sized and in good repair, so that birds remain free from injury and are unable to escape.

FACTORS WHICH CAN CAUSE STRESS

Removal of Feed and Water

Poultry should never be caught and loaded the night before transport due to their inability to have access to feed and water. Always catch and load immediately prior to transport to minimize the animal's stress and to allow them to have access to water for as long as possible. Contact the abattoir you will be processing the birds at to determine when feed withdrawal should occur, taking into account weather conditions and time of transport.

Never load birds and allow them to sit overnight

Restricting an animal's ability to perform normal functions (walking, sitting, eating, drinking, etc.) should be minimized as much as possible. Furthermore, loading earlier than necessary makes it difficult to visualize and evaluate if birds are "fit for transit."

Exposure to Extreme Weather

Extreme or inclement weather (extreme hot or cold, rain, snow, etc.) will stress birds and may lead to death (especially if the birds are young, small, have poor feather cover or are wet). Birds must always be protected from extreme weather, both during loading and transport. In the heat of the summer, birds should be transported during the early morning, protecting them from the sun to prevent sun stroke and in a conveyance that has lots of airflow. Care should be used if using a tarp to ensure that the birds will not suffocate or get heat stroke.

Birds are NOT to be loaded for transport in cool or cold weather if they are wet as they can suffer from hypothermia when they are soaked to the skin. Measures should be used to protect birds from cold, wet or snowy weather so they do not suffer undue stress.

Confinement in Containers

During transport, birds are placed in crates or containers that will limit/minimize their movement. If this is done correctly, it can minimize stress and protect birds from injury. If this is done incorrectly, it increases the stress level, the number of injuries and the risk of death. The codes of practice and the *Poultry Loading Decision Tree* provide help to identify the number of birds that should go in a container. The *Poultry Loading Decision Tree* is located on the Poultry Industry Council website at www.poultryindustrycouncil.ca/resources/transport-decision-tree/decision-tree/.

The number of birds will need to be adjusted depending on multiple factors, such as weather, size of birds and species.

A good rule of thumb is that all birds should be able to rest without touching another bird.

Catching and Loading

It is important that all birds are handled in a calm manner. The owner of the birds should ensure that anyone catching/handling the birds is experienced and appropriately trained. Birds require special handling. They can feel pain and can be severely injured by rough handling.

Laying hens (especially end-of-lay animals) need to be carried with caution. Take special care as their bones are very fragile.

Furthermore; all birds have difficulty breathing when held upside down and prefer to be handled in an upright position. Catch them by holding under them under the breastbone.

Catchers should avoid quick movements and loud noises. Do not yell or run at the birds.

Use low lighting or blue lights when catching birds — this will reduce their stress but also make them easier to catch. Corral birds into small groups using dividers or screens to prevent crowding or piling. Bring crates into the barn prior to catching to minimize bird-handling time.

Using the Right Equipment

On large farms, birds are routinely transported using plastic crates (chickens) (Figure 1) or turkey liners (turkeys). Crates or other cleaned and disinfected containers may be available from your local processing plant or you may need to have your own. Dog crates, with liners or pans, are suitable for transporting larger poultry (i.e., turkeys, ducks).



Figure 1. Plastic chicken crates need to be routinely cleaned and disinfected.

Consider the following when determining what method of transport to use:

- Transport crates should be made of material that is easy to clean and disinfect (all crates should be cleaned and disinfected before loading).
- Birds must be secure, being mindful that there are no protrusions of the wings, head, legs and toes. Ensure all birds can rest on the floor of the container and not be on top of one another.
- Adequate, uniform ventilation is necessary.
- Place birds on their feet in the crate, never on their back. Remember to give birds enough room to adjust their position.

Birds must **NEVER** be transported:

- in the trunk of a vehicle
- in a bag (plastic, feed, paper, etc.)
- in a closed trailer (inappropriate ventilation for birds to survive when the vehicle is not moving)
- in a wooden crate (they cannot be properly disinfected)
- unsecured in the back of a trailer (loose birds can suffer potential injury if a vehicle is stopped suddenly)

When transporting birds, keep in mind:

- **Air circulation stops** when the vehicle is not moving. Birds can easily die from overheating and suffocation.
- **In inclement weather** birds must be protected.
- **Birds must not be wet before loading.** Wet birds are not able to stay warm or cool down properly.
- **Stack crates** to allow for air circulation.
- **Load immediately** before transport. Never load birds and allow them to sit overnight.
- **Never mix large or small** birds in the same crate or mix different types of birds (i.e., ducks and chickens) in the same crate. Mixing bird sizes or species can cause undue stress and potential death from smothering or pecking.
- Never load a bird that is not **“fit for transport.”** Refer to the guidelines listed below for what is considered fit for transport. If you identify sick/injured birds, cull or contact your veterinarian.
Do Not transport to abattoir.

Compromised Birds

Sick or injured birds cannot be transported. Guidelines on how to identify and handle compromised birds can be found at the Poultry Industry Council website www.poultryindustrycouncil.ca/education2/transport-decision-tree/decision-tree/.

For a list and contact of licensed poultry processing plants in Ontario go to ontario.ca/livestock and search for “Licensed Poultry Processing Plants.”

For current codes of practice visit National Farm Animal Care Council at www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA). Transport of Hens for Backyard Flocks, 2009.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Meat Hygiene Manual of Procedures (MOP) Chapter 12: Food Animal Humane Handling and Slaughter - Animal Welfare Requirements Part C: Poultry and Rabbit Species.



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