Where do I get help when I suspect a health problem in my poultry flock?

University Diagnostic Laboratories

The Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System (PADLS) has several university-based veterinarians with advanced training and expertise in poultry diseases. They have experience diagnosing all types of avian health problems, from the common to the unusual, and can help sort out individual bird problems from those that may cause sickness in the entire flock. Diseases that may spread to other animals and people can also be identified. Conditions that may impact food safety of poultry meat and eggs can be detected or ruled out. The PADLS laboratories are primarily focused on diagnostic pathology, disease surveillance, and regulatory disease testing; these diagnostic lab veterinarians can answer general questions about poultry diseases, but they do not examine or treat live birds.

Please contact either of the labs below for consultation and information on sample submission, preferably the closer to your location:

Penn State Animal Diagnostic Laboratory
University Park, PA (Centre County) Phone: 814-863-0837
Website

University of Pennsylvania New Bolton Center PADLS
Kennett Square, PA (Chester County) Phone: 610-444-4282
Website

Private Practice Veterinarians

Private practice veterinarians who are known to work with poultry patients should be contacted for examination and treatment of sick birds, especially with reference to a single bird with specific problems. Note that not all veterinarians or clinics are comfortable working with poultry patients. Bird owners should identify veterinarians/clinics in their area who are willing to see poultry patients before they have a problem so that they know who to contact if their bird(s) get sick. If you don't already have an established relationship with a veterinarian who is willing to work with poultry patients, try contacting either local small animal clinics or large/mixed animal practices in your area. The university-based veterinarians listed above are available as a resource to help guide private practice veterinarians in sample selection and diagnostic testing.
PDA Veterinarians
The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services also has veterinarians on staff involved in efforts to keep birds healthy and prevent disease spread. Their mission is mainly focused on diseases of regulatory importance such as Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease, and they will be involved in directing the sampling for these if appropriate. At the owner’s discretion, they may be able to facilitate contacting the university-based veterinarians for consultations and investigations into a variety of more common disease problems that may be occurring in the flock in question. Some PDA veterinarians are based at the main offices in Harrisburg, and there are staff in each of seven regions in the state. You may know the PDA veterinarian in your region from fairs or certified poultry technician training courses. Contact phone numbers for these offices are as follows:

State Veterinarian
- Harrisburg: 717-772-2852

Regional Veterinarians (7 offices)
- Northwest (Meadville): 814-332-6890
- North Central (Montoursville): 570-433-2640
- Northeast (Tunkhannock): 570-836-2181
- Southwest (Greensburg): 724-832-1073
- Central (Altoona): 717-705-5500
- South Central (Harrisburg): 717-346-3223
- Southeast (Collegeville): 610-489-1003

USDA Healthy Birds Hotline
The United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a national toll-free hotline to report significant illness or deaths consistent with avian influenza and exotic Newcastle disease, both highly contagious viral diseases. These signs can include:
- sudden death without clinical signs
- lack of energy or appetite
- decreased egg production
- soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- swelling or purple discoloration of head, eyelids, comb, hocks
- nasal discharge
- coughing
- sneezing
- incoordination
- diarrhea

If applicable to your situation, call the USDA Healthy Birds Hotline: 866-536-7593. Callers will be routed to a state or federal veterinarian in Pennsylvania for a case assessment.

Penn State Extension
The Penn State Extension Poultry Team has experts in many other areas of keeping poultry, including breeding, incubation, genetics, judging, nutrition, housing, ventilation, etc. Many health problems are related to these factors rather than infectious disease agents alone.

What else should I do?
If birds are dying, the dead should be double-bagged and refrigerated (do not freeze) for possible testing. Meanwhile, until the problem is investigated further, diagnosed, and/or resolved, put your flock on “voluntary quarantine.” This means operating as a closed flock during this time. Do not buy, sell, trade, or otherwise move birds to or from your premises. Do not visit other flocks, poultry auctions or shows, or receive visitors who have their own birds. These measures will help prevent potential disease-causing agents from being transmitted to other flocks and new agents from being introduced into yours.

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