



# Avian Pox (Fowl Pox)

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Avian pox is a viral disease affecting chickens and many other birds caused by *Avipoxvirus*. These viruses are fairly species-specific. The disease spreads slowly from bird to bird. Transmission requires a vector, such as mosquitos or mites that harbor the virus. Bird-to-bird transmission can also occur through scratches, pecking scabs, etc.

This fact sheet addresses specifically fowl pox affecting backyard chickens.

## Disease Presentation

Fowl pox can infect all ages of chickens. There are two forms of the disease: cutaneous or “dry” form (on skin) and diphtheritic or “wet” form (inside membranes of mouth, trachea and esophagus). Both forms can occur together. The cutaneous form is characterized by nodules that turn into scabs on face, comb, and wattles. The diphtheritic form is manifested in respiratory distress, such as gasping, wheezing, and difficult breathing. Care must be exercised in ruling out other respiratory diseases, such as infectious laryngotracheitis and infectious bronchitis. Definitive diagnosis of fowl pox requires the assistance of a poultry diagnostic laboratory.

## Control

1. Isolate affected chickens (all affected birds can be housed together if needed, but away from the main area where any unaffected flocks are housed).
2. After recovery, it is probably best to depopulate before replacement chickens are brought onto premises.
3. After removal of the infected flock, thoroughly clean out pen and remove all litter and dust. Wash down with soap and water. Wash out all drinkers, feeders, and other equipment. Disinfect with a household chlorine bleach solution. (This will only be helpful on clean surfaces free of organic debris.)
4. Repair and eliminate any sharp edges in pens and elsewhere within the coop and run where chickens might cut or scrape themselves.



**Figure 1.** Severe case of cutaneous (“dry”) form of fowl pox.

5. Maintain an ongoing mite control program, including application of approved insecticide to roosts, nests, and floors.
6. Consider screening off run and coop during mosquito season.
7. Eliminate standing water, old tires, garbage, old equipment, and vegetation from around the coop and runs. Keep manure and litter cleaned up to minimize fly populations.
8. If lawful in your area, a vaccination program initially using a pigeon pox-origin vaccine might be helpful. Please confer with a veterinarian who specializes in poultry before beginning, as improper application and use of fowl pox vaccines could cause serious problems for your chickens

## **Treatment**

There is no treatment for fowl pox. Specific treatment recommended by a poultry veterinarian may be needed for any secondary infections that may occur. Once a chicken has run through a course of fowl pox, it becomes immune from future fowl pox infection. Fowl pox is not a human pathogen.

## **Bibliography**

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