

Fowl Pox

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Have your chickens ever had white lesions that developed into wart-like nodules, and then formed dark scabs on their comb and wattles? If so, then your chickens had fowl pox. Fowl pox is not new; it has been around since the earliest history.

Fowl pox is a slow-spreading viral disease in birds. Fowl pox can affect birds of any age, and is transmitted by direct or indirect contact. The fowl pox virus can be transmitted by several species of mosquitoes, and that is why we see fowl pox in chickens in Louisiana.

There are two types of fowl pox: dry and wet. The dry pox is the type that forms nodules, and eventually scabs, on the comb, wattles, ear lobes, eyes, and sometimes feet of chickens. The wet pox occurs in the oral cavity and upper respiratory tract. Fowl pox is usually easily diagnosed based on flock history and the presence of the typical lesions.

There is no treatment for fowl pox, and mortality is not significant (unless the respiratory tract is severely affected). Once a flock is infected, the disease spreads slowly and the flock will be infected for several months. The course of the disease in the individual bird takes three to five weeks. Most birds will continue to eat and drink normally while affected by the disease. However, young birds may have retarded growth, and layers may decrease egg production. Also, birds that are affected by the wet type of fowl pox may have difficulty eating and breathing.

Disease control is accomplished best by preventative vaccination. Normal management and sanitation will not prevent fowl pox. Chicks can be vaccinated at one day of age, and replacement chickens can be vaccinated at six to ten weeks of age. Once chickens are vaccinated for fowl pox, they have permanent immunity.

If fowl pox occurs in your exhibition show birds, remember that they will not be admitted to shows while they are exhibiting signs of the virus. This policy is intended to protect your flock, as well as the flocks of the other exhibitors.

Thus, if your chickens have or have had fowl pox, you are not alone. Just keep in mind that the disease will run its course and your flock will recover. This is just one more reason to practice strict biosecurity procedures for your flock.