

St Marks CofE Primary School Farm



A Guide to Caring for Chickens

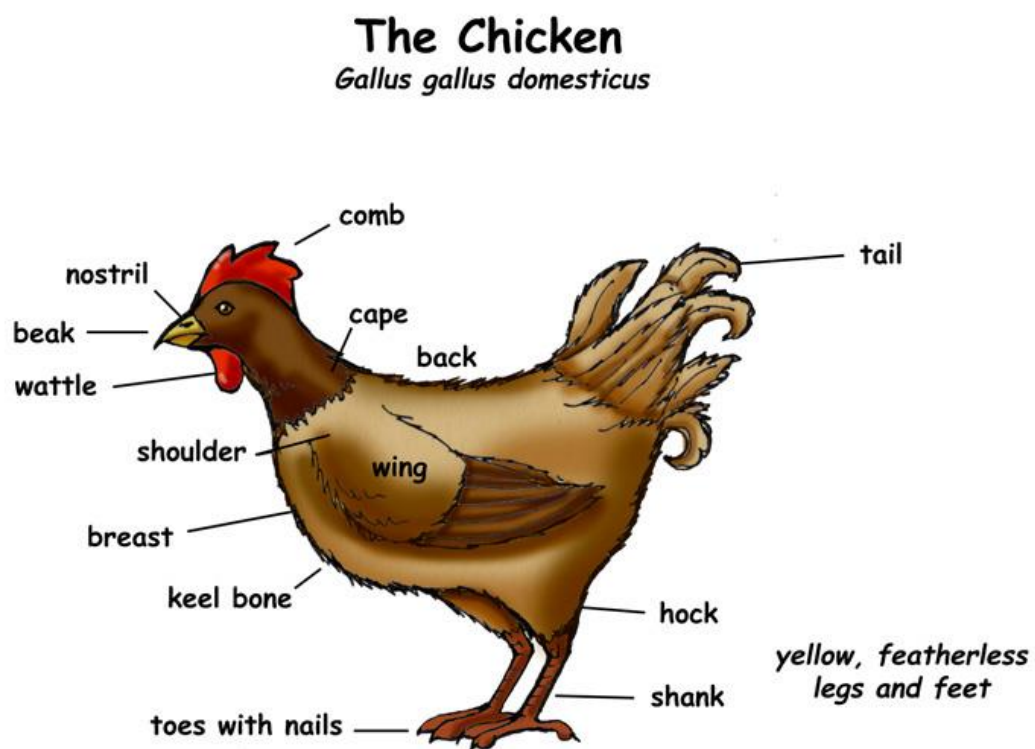


Introduction to Chickens

Chickens are fascinating creatures! They are birds most commonly used for egg and meat production for human consumption, however they also make great pets. Chickens come in many different breeds, each with their own characteristics. They are social creatures and love living flocks where they spend all day together, scratching and pecking at the ground to find food.

Chickens are intelligent creatures, more so than people give them credit for! In fact, they have been known to be able to recognise and remember different human faces! Studies have also shown that chickens are able to use logic and reasoning to solve complex problems. For example, they are able to understand that an object hidden from view still exists, and they are able to use tools to find their food!

Chicken Anatomy



Chicken Husbandry Guidelines

The Animal Welfare Act 2006

By law, anyone who keeps animals is placed under a duty of care by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. This is a piece of legislation that sets out the requirements you must meet in order to keep your animals healthy and safe. The act sets out 5 animal welfare needs that you must adhere to when keeping your chickens. This booklet will help guide you to meet these needs to the best of your ability.

The 5 animal welfare needs:

- need for a suitable environment.
- need for a suitable diet.
- need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.
- need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals.
- need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury, and disease.

Now, let's look through the 5 animal welfare needs individually.

A Suitable environment

Inside environment – The coop

A coop must be provided for shelter from poor weather as well as a safe place to rest at night. The floor of the coop must be covered with a suitable dry substrate, such as straw. You should top this up or replace it when needed.

Perching is one of the strongest natural instincts chickens have, and something that makes them feel safe, while also providing comfort and stimulation. Perches in the coop should be 3 – 5 cm thick and made of a smooth wooden material. Never use metal perches as during the cold winter months a chickens' feet can freeze to the perches!

Nest boxes must be present in the coop as a quiet and enclosed place to lay eggs. These should be draught-free and lined with a clean, dry, comfortable nesting material, such as straw.

Finally, the chicken coop and everything inside must be regularly cleaned and disinfected to remove parasites and prevent disease.

Outside environment – The run

They need to be provided with enough space to be able to roam and forage for food on good pasture. The run should provide opportunities for exploration and enrichment, such as tree branches for perching or slabs on the floor to act as a different texture and to keep nails trimmed. You must also provide an area for the chickens to dust bathe as this is how they keep themselves clean.

The grass in the run must be kept short. Long grass strands can become trapped inside the chicken's crop. This can lead to health issues such as impacted / sour crop. This is a yeast or fungus infection in the crop caused by food becoming trapped.

Shade must be provided as protection from the sun or bad weather. The plastic tarp must be over 1/3 of the run at all times. Any food or water in the run must also be placed under the sheltered area to avoid attracting wild birds.

A Suitable Diet

Layers Pellets

The chickens must have a constant supply of layers pellets throughout the day. Chickens will eat when they need it and should go to bed with a full crop as they need lots of food to produce eggs. A fully grown chicken will typically eat about 120 grams of layers pellets a day. You should check the feeders every day to ensure they are topped up with enough food.

Grit

Chickens need access to a constant supply of grit as part of their diet. As chickens do not have teeth, they swallow everything they eat whole. The whole food enters a part of their digestive system called the gizzard – a muscular pouch which helps to grind up food. Grit must be present in the gizzard to allow it to grind up food effectively. You can buy commercial chicken grit to supplement their diet.

You can also choose to provide the chickens with oyster shells as an added source of calcium in their diet which will help them to lay strong, healthy eggs.

Water

The chickens must have access to a source of fresh water, which must be changed on a daily basis. In hot weather, the water may need to be changed multiple times a day. To help keep the water cool, place it in a shaded area. In cold weather, you must ensure that the water doesn't freeze over.

Corn

Chickens love corn, however, it is high in fat and therefore should only be fed as a treat. Overweight chickens won't lay healthy eggs! When feeding corn, a handful of corn per hen scattered on the ground is plenty.

Fresh Greens

Please note, feeding kitchen scraps to chickens is illegal in the UK. Fruits and vegetables are a great way of providing your chickens with a source of vitamins and minerals. Fruit and veg should be treated as a treat when feeding chickens as they are also high in sugar. You can feed fruit and veg 3 – 4 times per week. Below is a list of some safe and unsafe fruit and veg for chickens, there are many more though (too many to list here!), so if it's not on the list please research before feeding it to the chickens!

Safe Fruit and Veg

- Apples (do not feed the seeds)
- Brussell Sprouts
- Banana
- Basil
- Blueberries
- Broccoli
- Celery
- Carrot
- Cucumber
- Kale
- Lettuce (do not feed iceberg lettuce)

Unsafe Fruit and Veg

- Avocado
- Fruit seeds, pits, or stones
- Citrus fruits
- Onion
- Rhubarb
- Rice
- Aubergine
- Potato
- Mushrooms
- Iceberg Lettuce
- Canned fruit or vegetables

Exhibition of normal behaviour patterns

In order to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of your chickens, and allow them to exhibit species specific behaviours, you must provide them with enrichment. There are lots of different enrichment ideas you can give your chickens, and a great place to look is on Pinterest!

A few examples include:

- Dust bath for bathing
- A chicken swing
- Variety of perching
- Scatter feeding
- Different substrates to explore
- Forage box
- Hanging vegetables
- Puzzle feeders

Enrichment is a great and fun way to bond with the chickens as you watch them explore, play, and have fun! Creating enrichment would also be a fun lesson for the children!



The need to be housed with, or apart, from other animals

Chickens are social animals and must always be around other chickens. You must never keep a solitary chicken, unless direct a vet for medical purposes. Chickens must always be in a flock of at least a minimum of two birds. Only ever house as many chickens as you have space for to avoid overcrowding and aggression due to lack of space.

Protection from pain, injury, suffering and disease

Healthy chickens are 'bright-eyed', alert and interested. You should always contact a vet if you're concerned about the health and welfare of your chickens. If you are unsure of what is wrong with your chicken, you should always contact your vet. Here are some common problems to look out for.

Signs of illness:

- Hunched posture
- Erect feathers
- Head tucked under the wing
- Reluctance to move
- Lethargic
- Hiding in corners
- Discharge from eyes, nose, or genital areas
- Feather plucking (bald patches)

Daily Health Checks

Every day, usually in the morning when you first let the chickens out, you should visually health check them to ensure they are not showing any signs of illness or disease. This will allow you to manage and deal with any health issue before the problem becomes serious.

What to look out for during the daily health checks:

- **Eyes** - Your chicken's eyes should be free from discharge, fully open, and bright.
- **Comb** - The comb should be firm, and a bright red if the chicken is in lay.
- **Droppings** - The droppings should be firm and dark brown with white on them. 10% of their droppings will be sloppy. This is perfectly normal and is just a sign that your chicken's gut is cleaning itself.
- **Feathers** - Unless in moult your chickens' feathers should be shiny and full. If there are any bald patches or the feathers look unkempt then this could be a sign of illness.
- **Legs And Feet** - You should check the scales on the legs and feet. They should be smooth and not lifting. If they are this could be an indication of scaly legs.

Cleaning

The chicken coop and run need to be cleaned regularly to prevent disease. It is important to keep your chicken coop clean as a build-up of droppings will cause a build-up of ammonia, and this ammonia can be damaging to your chicken's respiratory system and eyes.

The chicken coop should be spot cleaned on a daily basis, removing any visible faeces, and replacing substrate as necessary. The coop will need a full clean every week. To do this, remove all the substrate and disinfect the coop with the Safe4 disinfectant spray. Then place fresh substrate into the coop.

You will also need to check the coop run, as well as the larger run, for any faeces and remove these on a daily basis. This is important, not only to keep the coop and run clean, but also to prevent people from treading in chicken poop and walking into back into the school.

Any waste from the chickens must be put into a black bin bag. After use, the bin bag must be tied off and placed into the black wheely bin on the farm.

Food and water feeders must also be cleaned regularly to prevent the build-up of bacteria.

Parasites

Worms

Chickens can suffer from parasitic worms and will need regular worming to prevent them becoming infected. It is much easier to prevent worms rather than treat worms. There are many worming treatments available. Usually these are dispersed into the chickens' water or food supply. Products such as Verm-X or flubenvet are recommended.

Red Mites

Red mites are small parasitic mites that live in your chicken coop in the daytime and feed off the blood of your chickens at night. All types of chicken coops can get red mite however wooden coops tend to suffer from infestations the most.

Symptoms of red mites:

- Reduced egg production
- Pale comb and wattles
- Anaemia
- Presence of red or grey mites in the coop or on the bird around the vent area.

Treatment:

Red mites can be difficult to treat however there are products available on the market to buy, such as Smite Professional Disinfectant 1 Litre Concentrate or Barrier Red Mite X Concentrate - 500ml, in the case of an infestation.

Scaly Leg Mites

Scaly legs on chickens are caused by a parasitic mite (*Knemidocoptes mutans*) that burrow under the scales on the chicken's legs. The damaged tissue weeps, which is what these mites feed on.

Symptoms of scaly leg mites

- Raised scales on the legs
- Crusty legs
- Lameness (severe cases)
- In the early stages of the infection the chicken will have mild irritation. It takes several months of infection before the scales on the legs start to lift.

Treatment

Scaly mite can be treated by using a lotion that will soothe and kill the mites. There are a variety of lotions available, such as Johnsons Scaly Leg Lotion. Whilst treating, and after the infection has cleared up, you can use repellent sprays as a preventative measure. You should treat all of your birds even if only one bird has scaly legs, as scaly leg mite is very contagious, and it is highly likely that all of your birds will have the mite.

Lice

Lice are 2 to 3mm in size and can be found all over the chicken's body. They lay their eggs around the shafts of the feathers.

Symptoms of lice

- Reduced egg production
- Broken feathers, feather loss, over preening
- Red or sore skin around the vent area
- Scratching
- Lice crawling around the shaft of the feathers

Treatment

If your chickens have access to regular dust baths, they should be less likely to get lice. As a preventative measure, you can sprinkle Diatom powder into the chicken's dust bath, as this will prevent the lice from being able to get onto the chickens in the first place.

If the chickens do contract lice, then you can use a lice powder to treat them. Dust your chickens with a powder, working it into their feathers and onto the skin 3-4 times a week for 3 weeks. You will need to do this for 3 weeks as any eggs left will hatch and you will need to kill off those lice until your chicken is lice free. In the mornings you can also dust their chicken coop with the powder although be careful to not make it too dusty as dust can cause respiratory problems

Other Health Issues

Moulting - Moulting is a natural and healthy process which usually happens once a year. It involves the shedding of old feathers and the replacement of healthy new ones. Most chickens will moult towards the end of Summer and may even partially moult their neck feathers again at another time of the year. The process can seem quite slow but will normally last between 1 and 2 months. Moulting takes a lot of energy and therefore, the chickens may stop laying eggs during this period as they put all their energy into growing new feathers. You may want to provide your chicken with a supplement to ensure they remain healthy during this energy demanding time, such as poultry spice.

Broody Hens - From time to time hens will go broody and will be adamant on sitting in the nest box on unfertilised eggs. It is more common for hens to go broody in the summer months, but it can happen at any time of the year. It's easy to know when you have a broody hen as their behaviour changes a lot. The first thing that you will probably notice is that you will have a very grumpy hen on your hands. You should let the broodiness run its course, usually around 3 weeks. During this time, you must lift your hen out of the nest box and place her next to her food and water to ensure she is still eating and drinking.

Egg bound - Hens become egg bound when the egg gets stuck between her uterus and cloaca (tube by which faeces and reproductive fluids - including eggs - are expelled from the body). The hen will strain to pass the egg but will not be able to. Egg binding in chickens can be fatal if not spotted and treated.

Symptoms:

- Repeated straining with no resulting egg
- Hen will be in and out of the nest box without laying an egg
- Walking like a penguin - her bottom will be close to the floor.
- Droopy
- Not eating or drinking
- Hard abdomen

If you notice any of these symptoms, then you will need to carry out a check to see if she is egg bound. You can first feel her abdomen area for an egg like lump. If you can feel an egg, then it is likely she is egg bound.

Treatment

The recommended treatment for an egg bound hen is a warm bath. This will loosen the muscles and hopefully help the hen to pass the egg. If you have given a warm bath and your hen still hasn't passed the egg it is best to take her to the vet.

Daily Husbandry Guidelines

The chickens require two visits per day. One AM and one PM visit. Always ensure that you shut the door of the run behind you after entering/ leaving!

You must wash your hands and disinfect your shoes (using Safe4) before and after working with the chickens.

Daily AM Jobs: 8am – 8:30am

- The chicken run must be checked daily to ensure that there are no areas where the chickens could injure themselves or any areas that they could escape from. Check there are no signs of entry from vermin.
- The run must also be checked for damage which may cause harm to staff or children, such as loose strands of wire.
- Any signs of damage must be reported to senior staff immediately. The chickens must not be let out the coop if you deem the run to be unsafe or unsuitable for containment.
- Once the run has been checked, the chickens can be let out of the coop and into the run.
- This is a great chance to visually health check the chickens. Look out for any signs of injury, illness, or disease.
- Next, please ensure the chicken feeder is topped up with enough layer's pellets to last them for the day. Each chicken will eat roughly 120g each per day. The feeder should be left hanging inside the coop. They also need veg – Mondays = Broccoli, Wednesday = Kale and Saturday = Carrot. A handful of veg between them is fine.
- Ensure that the chickens grit bowl is filled up to the top.
- The chickens will now need fresh water. The water trough should be kept inside the coop.
- Collect any eggs laid overnight (these must be dated using a pencil)
- Wear gloves and spot-clean the chicken coop. Remove all the straw and poo from the tray of the chicken house and replace with a light layer of straw, as this is changed daily. Also spot clean the run picking up any faeces on the grass. Dirty straw and faeces must go into a black bag, which should then be tied off and placed into the black wheely bin.

Daily PM Jobs: 6pm – 6:30pm

- Collect any eggs laid during the day (these must be dated using a pencil)
- Visually health check the chickens looking out for any signs of injury, illness, or disease.
- If the chickens are still out in the run, they must be rounded up and locked inside the small run beneath the coop. Please leave the sliding door (at the top of the ramp) open, as chickens shouldn't be shut into the house before sunset.
- Spot clean the run picking up any faeces on the grass. Put any poo into a small white plastic bag, which should then be tied off and placed into the black wheely bin.

Please note - The chickens should be let out of the coop first thing in the morning and put away last thing at night, just before sunset. Ideally, the chickens should not be shut inside their house before sunset, especially during the hot summer months as they will overheat inside the coop which can be fatal. Therefore, we are only locking them into the small run beneath the coop so that they will put themselves to bed at sunset. This, however, ensures that they are still safer than being out in the big run overnight.

Chicken Care Calendar

The daily, weekly, and monthly jobs for caring for chickens.

Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Check the run for signs of damage	Full clean and disinfect coop	Worming every 1 – 6 months (dependant on product used)
Let chickens out into the run	Fresh fruit and veg 3 – 4 times per week	Nail trimming (only if needed)
Visual health checks	Enrichment 3 – 4 times per week	
Food, grit, and fresh water		
Collecting and dating eggs		
Spot clean coop and run		
Shutting into coop at night		

Chicken Shopping List

Below is a guide to the products you will need on a regular basis to care for the chickens.

- Straw
- Safe4 disinfectant
- Black bin bags
- Disposable gloves
- Layers pellets
- Chicken grit
- Oyster shell grit (optional)
- Corn (optional)
- Battles Poultry Spice (optional)
- Wormer
- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Fine sand (such as children's play sand) for dustbathing

Animal Risk Assessment: Domestic Chicken



Risk Assessment		Species: Domestic Chicken (<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i>)					
St Mark’s CofE Primary School		Assessment by: Tom Parker				Date: 1 st May 2023	
Review Date:		Approved by:				Date:	
Hazard/Risk	Who is at risk?	Likelihood	Severity	Risk Rating	Mitigations	Additional Control Measures	Completed
Zoonotic diseases	Staff, Students, Parents, Visitors	1	6	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Do not to touch your face or put anything in your mouth whilst working with the chickens.- Wash hands immediately after working with the chickens.- Eating and drinking is not permitted on the farm.- Hand-washing signage is in place to remind everyone to wash their hands.- Hand gel may be used for immediate visible contamination, but additional handwashing remains compulsory.- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning out the chicken coop and/or run, or any accessories, such as feeders.- Fresh cuts and grazes are covered before working with the birds.- Use the disinfectant Safe4 spray on your footwear when entering or leaving the chicken run.- Anyone with a compromised immune system are not permitted to work with the chickens.- The chicken house, run and equipment is disinfected regularly.- Students are not permitted to play in areas where chicken waste is disposed of.		

Injury from the chickens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pecks - Scratches - Wing flap 	Staff, Students, Parents, Visitors	2	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anyone, including students, handling the chickens are trained by competent staff in the correct handling and restraint procedure. - Do not hold the chickens near your face when handling. - Do not touch any of the mesh on the run. - Keep noise level to a minimum when handling the chickens. - Claws are trimmed if necessary. - Medical treatments, husbandry procedures (such as claw trimming and wing clipping) as well as prophylactic healthcare (such as worming and faecal screening) is to be carried out by trained staff only. - Any birds that are consistently aggressive towards the children will be re-homed. - Any injuries from the chickens are washed and immediately attended to by a first aid trained member of staff. 		
Minor Injuries from the chicken enclosure and equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scratches - Cuts - Splinters - Bruises - Pinched fingers in bolts and padlocks - Trips and falls 	Staff, Students, Parents, Visitors	2	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The chicken house and run are checked on a regular schedule for maintenance issues. - Wear gloves if handling any broken wire or mesh. - Lightweight feeders, drinkers and appropriately sized tools are used. - Students are briefed on safe tool use. - Tools are always stored correctly and safely after use. - Students are not permitted to ride in wheelbarrows. - Report/ treat any broken or stiff padlocks or bolts immediately. - Keep walkways and working areas clear from unnecessary debris, clutter, and equipment. - Suitable footwear must be worn on the farm. - Running is not permitted at any time on the farm. 		

<p>Major Injuries from the chicken enclosure and equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Head or eye injury - Back injury 	Staff, Students, Parents, Visitors	1	6	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The chicken house and run are checked on a regular schedule for maintenance issues. - Lightweight feeders, drinkers and appropriately sized tools are used. - Anyone working with the chickens is briefed on safe tool use. - You are not permitted to ride in wheelbarrows. - You are only permitted to carry heavy items, such as bedding, if you have received the correct training. - Students are prohibited from carrying heavy items. - Items too heavy to carry must be transported by other means, such as in a wheelbarrow. - Keep walkways and working areas clear from unnecessary debris, clutter, and equipment. - Suitable footwear must be worn on the farm. - Running is not permitted at any time on the farm. 		
<p>Allergic reactions and respiratory problems.</p> <p>Inhalation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dust, feathers, or bedding materials. - Mite powders 	Staff, Students, Parents, Visitors	1	4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anyone with known allergies or respiratory issues are not permitted to carry out potentially risky tasks such as adding or removing bedding to the chicken coop. - Students are reminded in their hygiene and safety briefing to let a member of staff know if they feel unwell at any point during or after working with the birds. - Anyone using mite powders must wear a suitable dust mask and anyone with known respiratory problems are not permitted to take part in this activity. - A low dust bedding will be used for the chicken coop. 		

Illness or injury from contact with chicken health care products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allergic reactions - Skin irritation - Poisoning 	Staff, Students, Parents, Visitors	1	5	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All chicken cleaning and health care products are stored safely in accordance with COSHH regulations and out of reach from students inside the farm shed. - Any products not covered by COSHH must be stored and used in accordance with the manufacture's guidelines and/or product data sheet. - Students are only permitted to use low-risk products. - Gloves must be worn, when necessary, as per manufacturers guidelines for any products used. - Fresh cuts and grazes are covered before working with health care products. - Any chicken medications must be mixed and administered and stored with strict supervision by staff. - You wash your hands immediately upon completion of cleaning/ health care tasks. 		
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Risk Rating = Likelihood x severity	
Likelihood: 1 = highly improbable occurrence 2 = occasional occurrence 4 = fairly frequent occurrence 6 = frequent and regular occurrence	Severity: 1 = negligible injuries 2 = minor injuries 6 = major injuries 10 = multiple major injuries

Risk Rating = Likelihood x Severity
Greater than 17 (requires immediate action or activity must stop)
12 – 16 (High risk)
8 – 11 (Moderate risk)
4 – 7 (Low risk)
1 – 3 (Very low risk)