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Commissioner

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EXTENSION

COVID-19 GUIDANCE for HANDLING BIRDS AND BACKYARD FLOCKS

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The practices and protocols below are to address the handling of birds and backyard poultry and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These recommendations are in addition to guidance provided by the [CDC](#), [USDA](#), [DECD](#), and other federal agencies as noted at the conclusion of this guidance.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in a heightened concern among both farmers and consumers questioning what they can and should do to protect themselves, their families, their workers, and their communities.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg) is aware that the sales of chicks has surged since measures have been put in place to limit the spread of coronavirus. The Department is not aware of any evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted by or through poultry.

The Department would like to remind businesses that are selling chicks, poultry, and poultry items to:

1. Educate their consumers on the proper care and handling of poultry.
2. Ensure that all live birds and hatching eggs are coming from a National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) approved source and/or are compliant with all importation requirements.
3. Ensure that your [Live Poultry Dealer license](#) is up to date.
4. Confirm the most recent biosecurity plan associated with the Live Poultry Dealer license is on file with our Department.

Protect Employees, Customers, and Your Business

In order to provide a healthy and consistent supply of live poultry, and to care for ourselves, live poultry dealers must be committed to adhering to health and safety standards identified by the CDC and this guidance.

- Wash hands regularly, at least 20 seconds each time, multiple times throughout the day.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover mouth with a bent elbow when sneezing or coughing. If a tissue is used, dispose of it immediately, and follow with proper hand washing.
- Maintain the recommended social distancing protocols of at least six (6) feet of separation between individuals.

- Limit access to and disinfect common areas regularly.
- Stay home if you are sick. Staff who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or think they have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, should inform management.
- Wear a cloth face covering/mask when in public.

Chick and Poultry Areas

Areas where you keep your chicks should be restricted to those who must handle the poultry, staff and volunteers who are necessary to meet the essential care, and maintenance of the poultry area.

- The poultry area should not be open to the public and access should be controlled.
- No pets are allowed in the poultry area.
- Signage regarding social distancing, frequent hand washing, not touching your face, (this includes the application of lotions and lip balm) etc., should be posted at all sites. [Post CDC's posters available in English and Spanish.](#)
- Please inform customers of the [CDC Guidance](#) concerning the transmission of diseases such as *Salmonella* from poultry. With so many new people just beginning to own poultry, it is important to inform them of the risks, and how to mitigate those risks.
 - **Wash your hands.**
 - Always wash your hands with soap and water right after touching backyard poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam.
 - Adults should supervise hand washing by young children.
 - Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not readily available. Consider storing hand sanitizer at your coop.
 - **Poultry belong outside.**
 - Don't let backyard poultry inside the house, especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored.
 - Set aside a pair of shoes to wear while taking care of poultry and keep those shoes outside of the house.
 - Stay outdoors when cleaning any equipment or materials used to raise or care for poultry, such as cages, or feed or water containers.
 - **Handle birds safely.**
 - Do not let children younger than five (5) years of age handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry without supervision. Children younger than 5 years of age are more likely to get sick from exposure to germs like *Salmonella*.
 - Don't eat or drink where poultry live or roam.
 - Prevent children from kissing, licking, or coming in very close contact with chicks.

USDA Guidance for Flock Owners

- Keep visitors to a minimum. If they must go near your poultry ensure that they have clean footwear (if not, provide boot covers/shoe covers/disposable plastic) and have not had access to other poultry within 48 hours.
- Wash your hands before and after coming in contact with live poultry.

- Boots must be clean: be sure to remove all droppings, mud, or debris from boots and shoes using a scrub brush then disinfect the boots. Keep a separate pair of boots for care of your poultry.
- Clean and disinfect any tools or equipment before using them. Have designated equipment for your poultry.
- Maintain and Monitor Poultry Health: Look for signs of illness. Know the warning signs of infectious bird diseases.
 - Report sick birds. Don't wait. If your birds are sick or dying, call a local veterinarian, cooperative extensive service, or state veterinarian. ctstate.vet@ct.gov (860) 713-2504

CDC guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/farm-animals/backyard-poultry.html>

USDA Guidance: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program>

For additional guidance for the agricultural industry, please visit the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's page, [Resources for Farmers During COVID-19](#).

Please reach out to AGR.Covid19@ct.gov with any COVID-19 related questions or concerns you may have. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture is actively working to support our industry and will continue to provide the most up-to-date information as it becomes available.