



AEC SOP 066 Handling chickens for the purposes of physical examination

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Purpose

- (1) The objective of this standard operating procedure is to provide guidance to the Charles Sturt University staff on:
 - a. Correct handling of chickens for the purpose of physical examination

Scope

- (2) This procedure applies to any person who is involved in AEC approved projects involving handling chickens
- (3) All researchers and teaching staff using animals for scientific purposes must be competent. For definition of competency refer to Charles Sturt University's Policy on 'Animal Care Competency Training and Assessment'

Details of procedure

Safety measures:

- (4) Inadequate or inappropriate handling/restraint can result in injuries to a bird. Care must be taken with the wings and legs of chickens when handling and restraining.
- (5) Injuries can be sustained to the operator from a bird kicking (scratching), pecking as well as wing movements. Chickens can carry pathogens and care should be taken to follow appropriate hygiene measures. Wash hands and exposed body parts thoroughly with soap and water after handling. For your own safety, make sure that all OH&S conditions are met.
- (6) At all times a chicken must be handled gently; they have fragile bones, lack a diaphragm and therefore must be able to move their keel bone (sternum) to breathe. When holding a chicken their legs should not be held together but rather the operator should have a finger in between the legs to provide support and prevent injuries.

Handling

- (7) When investigating a bird's health, one should first observe the bird's appearance and behaviour from a distance. In general, a healthy bird is bright, alert, and responsive to the environment.
- (8) Restraining the chicken is important when performing a physical exam. It is important to keep the bird calm so that it does not hurt itself or the handler.
- (9) Place hands over top part of wings (shoulders) and hold securely but do not squeeze. Pick up and hold under arm to keep wings in place. Support the feet with one hand and restrain the legs between three fingers of the other hand. Never handle a chicken by its wings.
- (10) A bird should not be held upside down as it will increase the stress level of the bird and cause regurgitation and possibly subsequent aspiration pneumonia. After the bird is restrained, the exam can begin.



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- (11) When examining the head and neck of the chicken, one should observe the colour of the comb, and any possible scabs. The bird should hold the head high, indicative of good muscle tone, and be free from swelling. Examine the eyes for cloudiness and nostrils for any discharge. Evaluation of the feathers is important, as it may reveal parasitic infection or evidence of foul play in the flock. On examination, the feathers should lay flat against the body and be well preened. Lift the feathers and check the base of the feather shaft. This area should be checked for parasites (lice and mites). Check the feathers in the tail and vent region for any faecal material as white build-up or pasty vents may be indicative of an intestinal disease. The breast muscles should be examined, by gently pressing fingers between the breast muscles, one can get an idea of the muscle tone. The wings can be extended and examined for swelling or lacerations and palpated for broken bones and other possible injuries.
- (12) The bird should not exhibit pain during wing extension. The scales on the feet and the bottoms of the feet should also be examined for any scratches, swelling, scabs or ulcerations.

Drugs, chemicals, or biological agents

- (13) None required

Impact of procedure on wellbeing of animals

- (14) Compliance with this SOP will ensure that there is no negative impact on the wellbeing of the chickens being handled.

Animal care

- (15) Transport, handling, and caging will be conducted in accordance with the Primary Industries Standing Committee Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals. Land Transport of Poultry Second Edition. PISC Report 91.

Pain relief

- (16) These procedures are not known to cause pain which requires analgesia.

Reuse and repeated use

- (17) Each chicken will be used once.

Qualifications, experience or training necessary to perform this procedure

- (18) Demonstrators should have been trained for this procedure.



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Record requirements

(19) None required

Associated documentation (including pictures if available)

(20) None required

Glossary

(21) None required

References and relevant links

- (22) Diseases of Poultry, 13th edition, Swayne, D. E. 2013, Wiley-Blackwell, ISBN: 978-1-118-71973-2
- (23) Performing a Physical Exam on a Chicken, Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet, 2019, <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/vme-20>
- (24) Primary Industries Standing Committee, Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals. Land Transport of Poultry. Second Edition. PISC Report 91
<https://www.publish.csiro.au/ebook/download/pdf/5391>