



SOP 2.02 Euthanasia of chickens

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Purpose

- (1) The objective of this standard operating procedure is to provide guidance to Charles Sturt University staff on:
 - a. Humane euthanasia of chickens, either by cervical dislocation if under 7 days old, or otherwise by intravenous pentobarbital injection.

Scope

- (2) This procedure applies to any person who is involved in AEC approved projects involving the euthanasia of 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 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 by the operator from a bird kicking (scratching), pecking, and wing movements. Chickens can carry pathogens. Disposable gloves must be worn. Wash hands and exposed body parts thoroughly with soap and water after handling. Ensure all OH&S conditions are met.
- (6) At all times a chicken must be handled gently. They have fragile bones, lack a diaphragm, and must be able to move their keel bone (sternum) to breathe. When holding a chicken, legs should not be held together. Place a finger between the legs to provide support and prevent injuries.

Euthanasia:

- (7) Before performing euthanasia, weigh the bird in grams. This is essential to assess body condition and to calculate the correct drug dose.

Cervical dislocation:

- (8) This method is acceptable for small birds 1–7 days old and under 200 g, which are too small for injection. Grasp the legs and stretch the neck by pulling on the head while applying a ventro-dorsal rotational force to the skull. This should result in complete dislocation of the brain from the spinal cord, causing rapid cardiac and respiratory arrest. Technical proficiency is required. Personnel must train on anaesthetised or deceased



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animals before performing this method on live birds. Pre-sedation should be applied where practicable.

Intravenous injection of euthanasia solution:

- (9) This is the preferred method for chickens over one week old. It does not result in tissue changes that would affect post-mortem examination or diagnosis.
- (10) Pre-sedation is strongly recommended prior to IV injection to reduce stress and facilitate restraint and is required when students perform euthanasia. If the operator is experienced and confident in restraint, pre-sedation may be omitted at the operator's discretion. When used, intramuscular sedation into the pectoral muscles may include:
 - a. Tiletamine/Zolazepam (4–25 mg/kg IM), or
 - b. Midazolam (0.2–1 mg/kg IM) combined with Butorphanol (2–4 mg/kg IM).
- (11) Where possible, a second trained person should assist with restraint, allowing the operator to focus on venipuncture and injection. If working alone, prepare Sodium Pentobarbital at 140–150 mg/kg body weight in a 2 mL syringe. Dilute 50:50 with distilled water to reduce viscosity. Restrain the bird with the non-dominant hand around the base of the wing so that the middle finger and thumb almost touch. Tuck the legs under the elbow of the non-dominant arm. Pressure from the forearm keeps the bird against the handler's chest, exposing the wing web on a horizontal plane. Pluck a minimal number of feathers over the elbow of the restrained wing to visualise the brachial (wing) vein. Insert the needle into the vein and confirm placement by dark red flashback of blood at the syringe hub. Inject the pentobarbital slowly. Correct placement is confirmed when the red colour of the vein disappears from the injection site. Place the bird on the table. Death is confirmed by absence of heartbeat and respiratory movement, assessed by observation or palpation.

Drugs, chemicals, or biological agents

- (12) Sodium Pentobarbital euthanasia solution: (e.g. Lethabarb®, Valabarb®, Euthasol®)
Pre-sedation agents: Tiletamine/Zolazepam (e.g. Zoletil®), Midazolam, Butorphanol.

Impact of procedure on wellbeing of animals

- (13) Chickens will be euthanised. Correct technique ensures rapid loss of consciousness and death with minimal distress.

Animal care

- (14) Transport, handling, and caging must 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

- (15) These procedures are not known to cause pain requiring analgesia. Pentobarbital produces rapid loss of consciousness and death.



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Reuse and repeated use

- (16) Each chicken will be used once.

Qualifications, experience or training necessary to perform this procedure

- (17) Demonstrators must have been trained for this procedure.
(18) Students performing euthanasia must pre-sedate the bird with an intramuscular injection before euthanasia to limit movement and reduce stress.

Record requirements

- (19) None required.

Associated documentation (including pictures if available)

- (20) None required.

Glossary

- (21) None required.

References and relevant links

- (22) Avian Euthanasia Policy Document, Association of Avian Veterinarians Australasian Committee. <https://www.aavac.com.au/files/AAVAC-%20Euthanasia.pdf>
(23) AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2020 Edition. American Veterinary Medical Association. <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/euthanasia-guidelines>
(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>
(25) Malik A. (2025). Avian Euthanasia: Welfare Considerations and Clinical Techniques. LafeberVet. <https://lafeber.com/vet/avian-euthanasia-welfare-and-techniques/>

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