

## Backyard Chickens in the Urban Environment

Interior Health's Public Health sector has prepared this document to guide your council's review of the health implications of community residents raising chickens in their backyards for egg production.

This document is for informational purposes. There is evidence to be found on both the positive and negative aspects of raising backyard chickens. However, the evidence does not strongly favour any one position.

There are some potential benefits to food security by allowing backyard chickens, as well as potential disease, food safety and nuisance issues to take into consideration. Disease transmission, food safety and nuisance issues can be mitigated with proper hygiene and controls related to handling of chickens and eggs and proper maintenance of the surrounding environment.

Thus, Interior Health neither supports, nor is opposed to, allowing backyard chickens within municipal boundaries, if appropriate protocols are in place and enforced.

### ***Points for Consideration***

The following are specific items that should be considered regarding the potential benefits and risks:

- Risk for pathogen transmission (e.g. Salmonella and Campylobacter) is present, but can be mitigated with proper housing and hygiene when handling chickens and eggs.
- The risk of avian influenza development is not appreciably increased by backyard hen. Urban hen keepers should be encouraged to follow the advice of *CFIA: Bird Health Basics - How to Prevent and Detect Disease in Backyard Flocks and Pet Birds*.
- Backyard chickens present a learning experience for families and neighbours and foster an understanding of where food comes from. Children learn first-hand about food, biology, geography and community.
- Concerns related to noise, odour and fecal waste disposal can be minimized if proper practices are followed. Where properly set up, composting of chicken manure and bedding is a possibility. It should be recognized that failure to control aesthetic concerns may increase opposition to urban agriculture and lead to land use conflicts.
- Having chickens allows families to know how the hens producing the eggs have been raised, fed and treated.
- Backyard chickens allow regular, convenient access to eggs that are of higher nutritional value than non-free range eggs.

## **Protocols**

Should a municipal city council allow backyard chickens, Interior Health's Public Health sector encourages municipalities to introduce protocols as part of bylaws that permit backyard chickens. Protocols should:

- require mandatory chicken enclosures and construction standards
- limit the number of birds per household
- prohibit mixing of birds
- establish minimum feed control practices and enclosure cleaning practices
- outline safe disposal of waste (surplus eggs, feces and carcass)
- include rules to guide the appropriate keeping of chickens, including animal welfare, hygiene practices and transmission of chicken-related diseases
- establish limits on egg distribution (limit to personal use) and prohibition of sale of eggs
- prohibit home-based slaughter of chickens
- prohibit sale of chicken meat

Municipalities should also consider the implications for bylaw infrastructure related to the ongoing monitoring of the chicken bylaw (i.e. bylaw enforcement officers).

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## **For Further Information**

CFIA: Bird Health Basics - How to Prevent and Detect Disease in Backyard Flocks and Pet Birds  
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/avflu/bacdoc/floeele.shtml>

University of Maine *Poultry Facts - Tips for Egg Safety from Farm to Table For Small Poultry Flock Owners.*  
<http://www.umaine.edu/livestock/Publications/TipsForEggSafety.htm> Accessed April 15, 2009.

Harrison, John. *The Poultry Pages - Rats and Other Vermin around Chickens.*  
[http://www.poultry.allotment.org.uk/Chicken\\_a/chicken-rat-vermin.php](http://www.poultry.allotment.org.uk/Chicken_a/chicken-rat-vermin.php). Accessed April 26, 2009.

Gov't of Alberta, Agriculture and Rural Development. *Checklist for Fly Control in Poultry Facilities.*  
[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/epw12257/\\$FILE/poultry.pdf](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$Department/deptdocs.nsf/all/epw12257/$FILE/poultry.pdf). Accessed April 26, 2009.

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. *Factsheet: Odour Control on Livestock and Poultry Farms.* December 2003.  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/03-111.htm>. Accessed April 26, 2009.

Ohio State University. Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet. *Veterinary Preventive Medicine: Predators of Poultry.*  
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/vme-fact/0022.html>. Accessed April 26, 2009.

Mother Earth News *The Community Chicken Project*  
<http://www.motherearthnews.com/eggs.aspx>

Pappas A.C. et al. Interspecies variation in yolk selenium concentrations among eggs of free-living birds: The effect of phylogeny.  
*Journal of Trace Elements in Medicine and Biology* 20(3) 2006, 155-160. [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)