



Bird Fact Sheet

(Poultry and other Wild and Domesticated Avian Species) Occupational Safety and Health Information

General Safety Information for Persons Working with Birds

The following information is intended to inform individuals who are involved with the care and use of animals about potential hazards (e.g., zoonoses, allergies, injuries) associated with working with various animal species and to provide information as to how they may lessen these hazards (e.g., personal hygiene, personal protective equipment [PPE]).

Zoonotic Diseases of Birds

Birds (wild species and domesticated poultry) can carry organisms that may cause infection and disease in humans (zoonotic diseases, zoonoses) that may be transmitted either directly (e.g., through handling live or dead birds) or indirectly (e.g., through exposure to feces or airborne organisms). Flocks of birds in a laboratory/teaching setting are usually closely managed and free of disease. The likelihood of a person contracting a disease from those birds is very low. However, there is always a risk of an outbreak occurring within the laboratory flock either due to a new bird being introduced, or the animal handlers unknowingly contaminating the flock by wearing clothing/shoes that has been in contact with disease-carrying birds from outside the holding facility. There are a number of diseases that are infectious to both birds and people such as **Psittacosis**, **Salmonellosis**, **Campylobacteriosis**, **E. coli**, **Avian Influenza**, and **Avian Tuberculosis**. Some diseases may also be transmitted through bird feces such as **Cryptococcus neoformans** and **Histoplasma capsulatum**. Some diseases found in wild bird populations acquire insect transmission between the bird and a human (**West Nile Virus**). Some of these diseases may not produce observable signs of illness in the bird; therefore, if you handle birds or their waste you must take appropriate precautions to prevent transmission of these infections. You can view more information on these agents and other agents in [Appendix C](#) of the university Infection Prevention Program and the [Occupational Safety and Health Program for Animal Handlers](#).

Injuries from Handling Birds

People can receive cuts, scratches, or puncture wounds when handling some bird species. Infectious organisms from the birds or their waste can enter skin wounds of handlers and may establish an infection. It is essential that people who handle birds for research or teaching be provided with training in proper handling techniques in order to avoid injury to themselves or the animals, such specific handling and restraint techniques, and protective clothing requirements.

Allergic Reactions to Birds

Various bird proteins, including those found in feathers, hairs and guano (feces), are allergens (material which causes an allergic reaction in people), and some may cause a disease called hypersensitivity pneumonitis, a lung condition that mimics pneumonia. Symptoms develop after

repeated exposure to the bird allergens. Signs of an allergic reaction usually occur several hours after exposure and may include runny/irritated nasal passages and/or asthma symptoms (wheezing and a dry cough).

How to Protect Yourself

Wash your Hands: The single most effective preventative measure that you can take is thorough, regular hand washing. You must wash your hands and arms after handling birds or their waste. You should avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands or contaminated gloves. You must never eat, drink, smoke, or apply makeup in animal rooms.

Wear Personal Protective Equipment: If you handle birds, you should wear a laboratory coat and the most appropriate gloves for the job. When in close contact with birds of unknown origin, or if you are working with birds in an infectious disease experiment, wear a mask or respirator, and also eye protection. You will be informed by your supervisor before the start of an experiment using birds if you need to use additional PPE.

Tell your Physician you work with Birds: Whenever you are ill, even if you are not certain that the illness is work related, always mention to your physician that you work with birds. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions about personal human health should be answered by your physician.

Seek Medical Attention Promptly: If you are injured on the job when handling birds, stop the bleeding of wounds and wash the affected areas with antibacterial soap and water. For fieldwork where soap and water may not be readily available, use of baby wipes (available in small portable packages) or alcohol-based cleansing gel is acceptable. Alcohol-based gels are neutralized by organic matter so the first application should be wiped off to remove debris, or the area can be cleaned first with a baby wipe, and the next application of gel can be left on the skin.

- Immediately report the incident to the facility director, your supervisor, or the teaching instructor if applicable.
- Those individuals needing immediate medical treatment for serious injuries may visit an appropriate healthcare provider for treatment (e.g., emergency room, primary care physician, students may also be treated at Student Health Services). Immediate medical treatment may be required if:
 - An individual's ability to breath properly is affected;
 - Bleeding is excessive and difficult to control;
 - An injury clearly needs sutures; or
 - There is a loss of consciousness associated with the incident.
- Employees' supervisor completes an [Employers' Accident Report](#) within 24 hours of the incident for employees. This document is specific to the Workers Compensation Program and is required prior to any follow-up medical services being provided for employees.
- The facility director or manager completes a General Incident Report form to be used by the facility director, facility manager, and Environmental Health & Safety for review of the incident.