



EXTERNAL PARASITES (LICE AND MITES) page 1 of 2

What are they?

- External parasites are small wingless insects that live on the skin of birds, most commonly found on chickens and turkeys. Much like the fleas and ticks your dog can get, these insects feed on either the skin or blood of poultry causing the fowl to become irritated or to look unhealthy.
- There are two types of external parasites that are commonly a problem in poultry: lice and mites.



Top Left: Adult lice, Top Right: Nits (eggs of lice) on feathers, Bottom Left: Mite infestation, Bottom Right: Mites and mite nits on feathers. Photos from Colorado Avian Health Program

Lice:

- Lice are visible to the naked eye. Look for yellow bodied, oval shaped, fast moving insects on the skin, or feather shafts. These are adult lice and they are commonly found near the vent of poultry but can also be found in the feathers directly below the beak and under the wing.
- If you have recently dusted, you may not see live adults. However, you can also look and feel for nits (eggs of the lice) on the shafts of feathers in the same areas that you would find the adults. They often look like clumps of small white/grey dots attached to and spreading from the feather shafts.

Mites:

- These insects are a bit harder to see but are still visible (and can easily be mistaken for dirt). The mites are fast moving, red to brown and near the vent or on the feathers of poultry.
- There may also be mite dust or dark clusters of eggs on the feather shafts.

How do they spread?

- Both lice and mites are spread by contact with infested birds (domestic or wild) or objects. Mites can also be introduced to flocks via infected rodents and wild animals. They can crawl onto people but cannot survive on human skin.

Please share this information with your friends and neighbors who keep poultry. You are the best protection your birds have!

To report sick birds or birds that have died from unknown causes, contact our Colorado Avian Health Program team at our Avian Health Hotline: 970-297-4008 or VDL_AvianHotline@mail.colostate.edu



EXTERNAL PARASITES (LICE AND MITES) page 2 of 2

What do I do if my birds have lice or mites?

- Prevention is key—but if necessary, live external parasites can be treated with poultry-specific pesticides. These (commonly known and marketed as poultry dust) can be purchased at most feed stores and come in both dust and spray options. It is important to read the application directions on the product labels to ensure proper treatment. At time of treatment, any nits should also be removed from the bird (sometimes by pulling feathers) to break the hatch cycle.

How do I prevent external parasites?



Screening for external parasites on a chicken



Lice nits clumped on feathers

Screening:

- Screen new birds for lice and mites before introducing them to the flock or housing facility, and don't introduce infested birds until treatment has been performed and there is no longer any evidence of infestation.

Exposure:

- Minimize the exposure of the flock to wild birds, rodents, and animals. If they cannot interact with your flock, neither can the lice and mites.

Housing Maintenance:

- Any crevice, crack, or seam is a great place to harbor lice and mites. Painting wood and sealing or eliminating cracks and seams will help reduce sheltering places in housing.

Regular Inspections:

- A regular health inspection of the flock is a great way of preventing any infestation or infection. Checking the flock for bugs on a normal basis is important for catching an infestation early, making it easier to deal with than one that has time to establish.

Please share this information with your friends and neighbors who keep poultry. You are the best protection your birds have!

To report sick birds or birds that have died from unknown causes, contact our Colorado Avian Health Program team at our Avian Health Hotline: 970-297-4008 or VDL_AvianHotline@mail.colostate.edu