

DIAL 9-1-1

By: K. J. Theodore

“A FIRST AID KIT FOR POULTRY”



I bet that's what you'd love to do every time one of your feathered friends has an illness or injury – come on, admit it, dial 9-1-1! I can just see it now – the tiny little stretchers, the toy-sized ambulance that screams off down the road rushing your little bird to the birdie hospital... well, get a grip – it's not going to happen. But wouldn't it be nice if it were that simple?

Getting back to reality... perhaps the best way to reduce some of the anxiety of an anticipated or actual injury or disease would be to have a basic **CHICKEN FIRST AID KIT** ready and accessible. I know it helps me out tremendously to simply have a few things at my very reach whenever I need them.

Allow me to make some recommendations with the following in mind: (1) These ideas can be modified to accommodate any type of poultry – waterfowl, chickens, turkeys, gamebirds, pigeons, etc. (2) You can keep it as simple as possible or go nuts... or anywhere in between. Just because I list something doesn't mean you must have it in your kit. In other words, lighten up, and don't take me so seriously – geeze. (3) Not all items will be readily available to you, and not all items will be available in your area – improvise. (4) And finally, no, my idea of a chicken first aid kit is NOT an ax in a box. There are other options in most cases (but sadly, not all).

I am going to weave in some advice on prevention as we go, since many of the ailments that you may find yourself needing to treat are highly preventable. First, let's talk about the most common of ailments that lead to the most painful of events for the newbie Fancier. There are two things that come to mind. Based on my experience in dealing directly with newer Fanciers who are in great emotional pain due to a devastating event that was not foreseen, these two things are Mareks Disease and Coccidiosis. In my experience, the prevention of these two illnesses alone can eliminate approximately 80% of the potential loss for a relatively new Fancier. (Older, more established flocks have either already experienced these things and have learned to deal with them, or they have built up resistant flocks over generations of raising their birds in the same location and in the same facilities.)

To prevent Mareks, I strongly recommend a Mareks vaccination program for day old chicks (chickens). I also recommend a boosting program for adults once a year, after the chicks are vaccinated. This is the most inexpensive and simple thing to do to prevent large and devastating losses, especially among your most prized show birds, in a newer flock. It is Murphy's Law (and some valid reasons) why Mareks always seems to attack our best birds. I have a complete article on the vaccination of chickens for Mareks, which you can read on my website for instruction on how to do it. The last time I checked, the vaccine was under \$10 and available through www.jefferslivestock.com. I know there are other poultry supply houses that advertise in the Poultry Press that carry it as well. Since I hatch in one week cycles for six weeks, I buy 6 vials in advance and place them in the frig until I need them. I do this in advance of the hatching season. There is no treatment for Mareks once your birds contract it, so here is a good use for the ax in the kit – just kidding... but the truth is that there is no cure. Rarely, one will recover, and these make good breeders if you're interested in breeding for Mareks resistance but this gets complicated.

The second most preventable disease is Coccidiosis. Again, there is a complete article on the subject on my website for brushing up on the big picture. But in simple terms, you can prevent most cases of Coccidiosis in young fowl by simple starting them on medicated feed (Amprolium) and keeping them on it for the first year. I start all of my birds on medicated feed, including my waterfowl. Amprolium is safe for waterfowl, contrary to common belief. I raise all of my Call ducks and Mandarins on it with great success. I have had no losses due to Cocci in over five years since I started this program.

If you want to add a treatment product to your First Aid Kit for Coccidiosis, then I recommend keeping some Amprol or Corid powder on hand. It is relatively inexpensive in powder form and both products contain Amprolium. I do not recommend any sulfa-based products for the treatment of Coccidiosis as it has been found to be toxic to chickens at rates that are actually effective. These products can be found at most Farm and Fleets and poultry supply companies.

For anything from a minor skin irritation on up to a devastating injury from a predator attack, I like to keep a tube of Neosporin (or any other triple antibiotic ointment) in the box. For serious loss of flesh injuries, I recommend my article on Cell Migration. Read it *before* you have to deal with this type of injury, so you're not trying to understand the concept while being severely stressed.

A nice compliment to the Neosporin ointment would be some square sterile gauze pads and some sterile tape. For those more feisty birds that like to remove bandages, I also like a product called Vet Wrap. It is a disposable and stretchy wrap similar to an Ace bandage, only it is much lighter in weight and disposable. It is a product commonly available through Equine supply houses. (It also comes in neat neon colors so you always know where that little bugger is when you have a hunch he's hiding in the flock trying to remove his bandage – he just can't hide with Vet Wrap on!)

Nail clippers, which I also use for the beak, should be in the kit. In addition, add a pair of scissors and a nail file. These can be used for a multitude of things, such as cutting bandages or tape, clipping a long beak or spurs, or nails. The nail file can be used to round off a sharp spur or smooth a clipping job on the beak or nails.

A bottle of rubbing alcohol and syringes with needles are handy if you're going to inject medications or vaccinate. I like to keep a 1cc syringe and a 3cc syringe, both with appropriately sized needles, handy at all times. You can reuse syringes, but I recommend you use a new needle every time. You can buy them by the box very inexpensively if you'd like to keep your cost down, but just a few on hand should be all you need if you are not over medicating your flock and simply using medications when absolutely needed. (I do use a needle for more than one chick when vaccinating for Mareks, but I slide it across a cotton ball saturated with alcohol between each injection.)

A couple of general use water soluble antibiotics should be in the kit, such as Terramycin, Gentimycin, LS-50, etc. (Choose one – don't be an overachiever...) Remember, many diseases have become resistant to many of the general antibiotics. Therefore, look up the disease you are treating for recommended treatment. Your research may reveal a resistance to a certain antibiotic, and gives you a chance to use something more effective.

After antibiotic treatment, it is always wise to replenish the good gut bacteria for proper digestion with a good probiotic supplement. (ALL of the bacteria in the system are killed off by antibiotic treatment – including the good stuff.) Either Probios or a product I like – Blue Ribbon Poultry Electrolyte Pak by Merck – is good to have in your kit. The Blue Ribbon product is a one-stop-shop in that it contains vitamins, minerals, AND probiotics in a powder you can simply mix into their drinking water at the rate of 1tsp/gal. for about a week. (I would use it at the rate of ½ tsp/gal every other day for routine use.) You can get this product from Farm and Fleet or www.poutrystuff.com. Poultrystuff doesn't always have it but Farm and Fleet does and it is very inexpensive.

The last three things I'm going to recommend are for the experienced Fancier who has the contacts to get the products and knows how to use them. They all require a Vet or a prescription. If you have a good relationship with your small animal vet (for your dog or cat), you may be able to get these items at a moment's notice from them. Antibiotic ophthalmic eye ointment or drops (non-steroid) is the first. These are beneficial for eye injuries and eye infections. The ointment works best in waterfowl, and the drop are best for non-bathing species.

The second is an antibiotic called Baytril. It is considered the "big gun" when dealing with serious infections that are not responsive to general antibiotics. This product should only be used when you have a serious health issue on a very valuable bird. Over use of this product increases the risk of resistance building in the bacteria that it is used to treat. Use it responsibly, rarely, and under the direction of a vet. It is relatively safe to use on the bird, but being a responsible Fancier also means not contributing to the resistance building of bacterial strains that effect both animals and humans. Baytril is enrofloxacin, the animal equivalent of ciprofloxacin ("Cipro" of Anthrax fame) in humans.

The third item is oral Nystatin for systemic fungal diseases and for the prevention of fungal illness during antibiotic treatment. This product requires a prescription that

must be filled at a regular pharmacy, but it is so safe that it is routinely used on human babies during antibiotic treatment, and it is very inexpensive. There are stronger anti-fungal products that can be used, but they too require a prescription.

The last thing I recommend you keep on hand is another prevention tool – Oxine. For those who routinely read my articles, there isn't much else to say about Oxine – you know the benefits. But for those unfamiliar with it, I have an article on my website called “The Many Uses of Oxine”. It's worth the read – many of its uses can have the combined effect of virtually eliminating all existing and current diseases from your flock, when used in conjunction with a solid vaccination and BIOSECURITY program. Yes! Another article on my website to read! And here you thought you were done reading – silly you. My article on Oxine is also located in the educational section of the APA-ABA Youth Program where we hope you are right now.