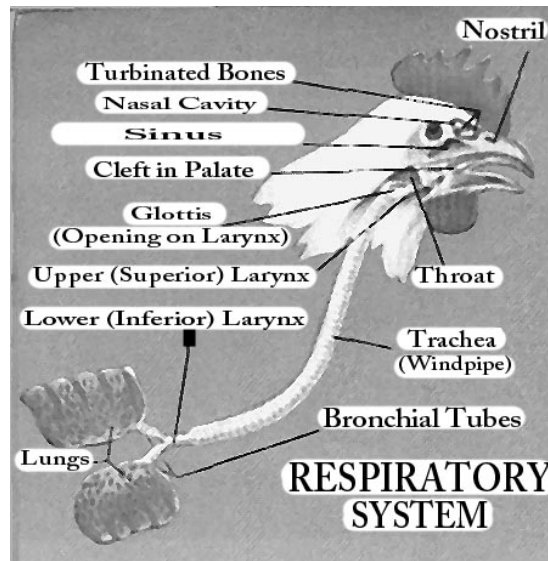


What is Mycoplasma?



Get ready – it's there on your property.

I know this looks like a lot of boring reading but it's only going to take a minute to read and it might save you a lot of problems in the long run. There is nothing like being prepared!

When someone says they are going through a case of mycoplasma in their chicken coop do you know what they mean? They might say I brought chickens home from a show and they have coryza or I bought some new birds from so and so and now I have birds with cold like symptoms, mycoplasma in my barn. Truthfully, you might not have brought it home from a show or brought it in when you purchased your new birds. Going to the show always causes stress for the birds, bringing new birds in and introducing them to the flock causes excitement, stress and stress can cause flare ups of many disease problems. I have a flare up of mycoplasma right now, yes, the birds were stressed when my neighbors dogs got in the barn and killed some chickens. Two weeks later I started getting the first signs of illness, sneezing and puffy eyes. No shows, no new birds. I've had it before, luckily years ago, and I'll have it again.

Mycoplasma is so common in the U.S. that I don't think any of us are immune from having these bacteria on our property. There is no way to prevent having this disease on our property when we buy birds and bring them home and settle them in with our flock. One small case of a mycoplasma infection in your coop will leave your property infected forever unless you completely eradicate all of your birds, completely and thoroughly disinfect your coop and everything in it, as well as the soil. Then let it stay unoccupied for weeks or months before you add more birds. Then, of course, the cycle begins all over again. Once a bird has the flare up of coryza, chronic respiratory disease or any other type of mycoplasma bacterial infection and you've treated the bird, cured it – it's still there, laying dormant and waiting for the next reason to become active.

Mycoplasma is caused by a bacteria. Mycoplasma is the cause many different types of respiratory diseases in poultry. Coriza is related to mycoplasma infection, CRD is another as well as diseases related to air sac disease. There are so many problems related to mycoplasma it's hard to list them all but these are the most commonly recognized.

These types of infections usually start with sneezing or coughing. Sometimes but not always you will notice a bird looking ill, with runny eyes, a little puffy or even just a little foamy. You might think they have just a little yellow "sleepy seed" in their eye, you clean it up, the bird opens its eyes for awhile and you go on your way. A rasping noise when breathing can sometimes be noticed. A good time to check your birds' health is at night when they are perching. At this time you can stand amongst them and listen for odd noises and sneezes which you may miss when they are moving about in daylight hours.

Mycoplasma infections often seem to take advantage of a weakened immune system, such as when the bird has had another infection of some sort. Often the initial respiratory infection will pass unnoticed in itself, with only the mycoplasma infections causing the visible symptoms.

A good way to check for respiratory infections is to gently squeeze the bird's nose at the top of the nostril to see if they have mucus in them. If they have it will show. (Yes I know it's yucky but lots of stuff to do with chickens is!) Also when first examining a bird sniff it!! Mycoplasma infections have a nasty smell; a quick sniff around the birds head will give you a clue. Put your ear to the birds back and see if you can hear any rasping breathing. (I have invested in a second-hand stethoscope and it's amazing how well you can pick up the sound of rattling lungs with it.)

The drugs usually used in cases of Mycoplasma Infections, are Tylan & Erythromycin. It is water soluble. Make sure the birds being treated do not have access to any other water or they will drink this in preference, because Tylan is horribly bitter. Sometimes I add a little sugar to the water to try and sweeten it up. I know it is bitter because when mixing it one time I got a whiff of the dust and when I breathed it in I could taste it for an hour, it's truly foul! I always keep a small stock on hand but pray I'll never have to use it. Of course, that hasn't happened yet.

Mycoplasma can be transmitted to the egg and carrier birds' can exist within your flock without you even being aware of it. If you regularly get outbreaks I have heard that treating chicks with antibiotics in the first few days of life can help stop it spreading amongst your flock. I haven't tried this and I suggest you ask your vet about it before you consider doing it; I have no details of drugs or dosages for this type of treatment.

There are many other respiratory infections of course, but if you have a bird with a snotty nose or puffy eyes it often seems to turn out to be a mycoplasma infection. So, get ready, be prepared before it's too late. Treat at the first sign of symptoms.