

Schools Animal Ethics Committee

Operating Procedure

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR TRANSITION OF CHICKS FROM BROODER TO UNHEATED ACCOMMODATION

Chickens need external heat for survival for about 6 weeks. This is normally provided by the mother hen. General guidelines for temperatures commonly suggested are:

Week 1 = 32 to 35 C
Week 2 = 30 C
Week 3 = 26 C
Week 4 = 24 C
Week 5 = 21 C
Week 6 = 18 C

Behaviour of Chicks is a Better Guide

The above temperatures are a general guideline however chicks do not always need as much constant heat as heat lamps deliver. Observation of the chick's behaviour will provide a better guideline.

- More heat required – chicks are huddling together close to the heat source.
- Less heat required – chicks are staying away from the heat source.
- Just right – chicks are dispersed throughout the brooder.

Week by Week Guide

Many schools use equipment supplied by specialist egg hatching companies to undertake an egg hatching activity in the classroom. The first two weeks of hatching and brooding use the supplied equipment and instructions provided by the company.

The following week by week guide starts at Week 3 and can be applied to chicks that are being kept by the school and transitioned to an outside coop.

Week 3

- Move the chicks out of the classroom into a larger brooder box located in an area that is completely sheltered from wind and rain.
- The new brooder still requires a heat source. Use the above temperature guidelines and observation of the chicks' behaviour to determine the temperature. Raise or lower the temperature by adjusting the height of the lamp.
- Waterer and Feeder: As the chicks grow raise the height slightly to help with maintenance.
- Outside coop: The brooder box can be located within the outside coop as long as there is shelter and facilities to maintain the heat source. In addition, the chicks should be separated from any older chickens in residence. Older chickens will try to establish a pecking order and this can be harmful to young chicks.

Week 4

- Temperature: Bring down the brooder temperature by raising the heat lamp.
- Field trip: Depending on the weather, now is the time to introduce the coop to the chicks in small doses around 1-3 hours daily with supervision. If there are older hens in the coop still keep them separated at this stage.

Week 5

- Temperature: Depending on the season, the heat lamp may no longer be required, as long as the temperature does not dip below 20C at night.
- Feathers: The chicks should be looking less like babies and more like miniature chickens, as adult feathers grow out.
- Separating the sexes: It's hard to tell the genders of most breeds of chicks, but by now you should be able to by examining their feather development – and it's a good time to separate the sexes – the cockerels (young roosters) and the pullets (young hens) – especially if your focus is on keeping only hens for laying.
- Coop: The chicks can take longer day trips to the pen.
- Feed: It's now time to start introducing grower crumbles as you finish up your chick starter feed.
- Feeders and Waterers: If you have not already, switch to adult size feeder and waterers.

Week 6 to 8: From Brooder to Coop

- Acclimating: Time to leave the brooder for the coop.
- Feed: Provide your chicks with adult chicken feed and an insoluble grit to pick at. Commercially prepared feed should be used to provide the correct balance of nutrients.
- Feeder: Hang the feeder (at the proper height at top of chicks' backs) to make it easier on the chickens – and less waste overall.
- Pen: Being outside (depending on the season/weather) should now be part of daily routine for the chicks, bringing them home to the coop to roost for the evening.

Week 12: Readyng the Hens I

- Nesting Boxes: Assuming you are raising hens for egg-laying, now is the time to install/prepare the nesting boxes, if you haven't already. These should be raised above the ground and away from roosting area (to avoid faeces contamination), ideally offering some privacy.

Week 16: Readyng the Hens II

- Feed (layers): Time to switch to a layer feed for your young hens.

Some Factors to Consider

- Different breeds have varying times they require heating. Larger chickens, well feathered hens and roosters will require less heating than the smaller breeds, breeds that have less fluffy feathers and roosters that grow faster than hens.
- The time of year – winter chickens need more heat and for longer than those raised in summer. Adverse weather conditions such as cold, windy days and nights will increase the requirements for heating.
- The number of chickens e.g. three huddled together generate and retain heat less efficiently than ten.
- The rate of heat loss to the surroundings – draughty and poorly insulated housing will require more heating for chickens to grow and thrive. Secure draught barriers like a box or temporary wall to retain heat and reduce wind.

- Type of food and feeding regime. The energy content and digestibility affect the amount of heating the chicken gets and for how long. Initially, chick starter crumbles formulation is recommended for at least 2-4 weeks gradually changing to grower crumbles around 6 weeks. Cracked wheat can also be introduced at 6 weeks at night because it takes longer to digest.
- Availability of food – if chickens can feed at night they will be generating constant body heat compared to a situation where they are fed at say 4:00pm and then at 8:00am next morning. Schools should consider that vermin control may be a problem with ad lib feeding.
- An infrared light provides light as well as heat. The chickens can see the food supply.