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# External Parasites of Chickens

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# External Parasites of Chickens

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The most common external parasites are Lice, Mites, Ticks and Fleas.

These are known as ectoparasites or external Parasites as they live on the outside of the bird.

# 1-Lice

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Lice are long, narrow, tiny insects that move quickly when you part a chicken's feathers.

Unlike human lice, chicken lice don't feed on blood; they eat feathers or shedding skin cells.

There are several types of lice.. Includes: Head lice, body lice, and lice that live on feather shafts



## Transmission

**From bird to bird:**

**By direct contact.**

**Via the hen house or  
contaminated litter.**

## Signs of Lice Infestation

Fast-moving lice (1–4 mm) at the base of the feathers.

- Nits (louse eggs) attached to feather shafts, especially below the vent.

Decrease in egg production.

Irritation and scratching.

Over-preening leading to:

- Feather loss
- Broken feathers
- Red, inflamed skin
- Bare areas (especially around the vent)

## Preventing Lice

Provide dust baths and treat birds with carbaryl powder.

Diatomaceous earth can be added to the dust bath to enhance effectiveness.

Avoid contact with birds that are infested with lice.

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The photo shows louse eggs (called *nits*) firmly attached to the base of a feather, found below the vent. These will take up to 3 weeks to hatch.



The photo shows an area below the vent which is typical when a hen becomes infested with lice.



## 2. Mites

Mites are very small, rounded arthropods that are usually visible only under a microscope.

They can also bite humans.

They differ from lice in that they feed on the blood of chickens.

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### Common Mites in Poultry

Northern fowl mite

Tropical fowl mite

Red roost mite

Scaly leg mite

### Transmission of Mites

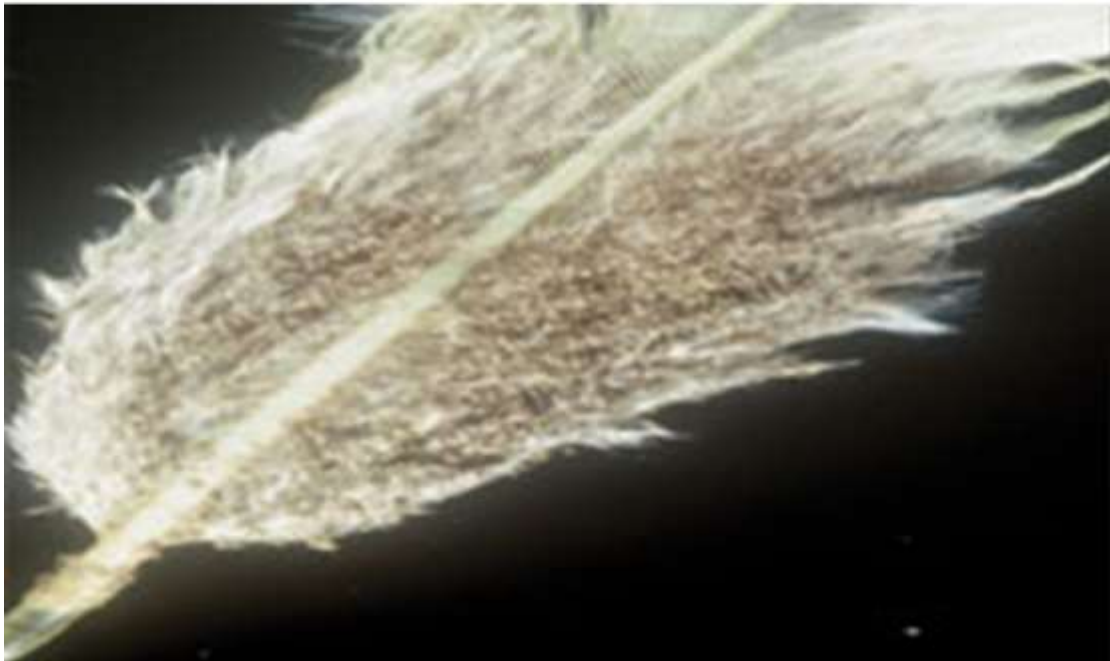
Mites can be transmitted between flocks via:

Crates and equipment

Clothing

Wild birds

Mites and eggs along the feather shaft.



## **Signs of Mite Infestation**

Darkening of feathers in white-feathered birds due to mite feces.

Scabbing of the skin near the vent.

Presence of mite eggs on fluff feathers and along feather shafts.

Clusters of mites around the vent, ventral abdomen, tail, or throat.

Reduced mating ability in roosters due to mite accumulation in the ventral region.

Anemia.

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TREATMENT OF LICE AND MITES  
IVERMECTIN: APPLY AS DROPS ON THE BACK OF THE NECK.  
PYRETHRUM-BASED POWDERS.  
ORGANIC POWDERS.  
DIATOMACEOUS EARTH.

# 3. Ticks

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The most important type is the soft tick.

Ticks feed on the blood of chickens for short periods. They spend the rest of their time hiding in crevices and cracks within the environment.

## Signs of Tick Infestation

Anemia, weight loss, decreased egg production, and general weakness in chickens.

Paralysis and transmission of spirochaetosis (diarrhea).



# Control of Ticks

Ticks are difficult to control.

Focus on treating the environment.

Tick control is achieved through:

Regular environmental spraying with approved acaricides (e.g., permethrin or deltamethrin)

Good hygiene practices

Thorough cleaning of cracks, crevices, and cages

Preventing re-infestation



# 4. Fleas

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There are many species of fleas that infest poultry.

The most common is the sticktight flea.

Fleas feed on the blood of chickens.

Cause irritation.

Can multiply in dead birds and in droppings.

## Signs of Sticktight Fleas

1. Small brown dots attached to or embedded in the fleshy parts of the head.
2. Inflammation of the head.
3. Decreased egg production and feed efficiency.
4. Anemia.
5. Secondary bacterial infections may develop.
6. Death may occur in young birds.

# Treatment

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## Treatment of Fleas

Apply carbaryl (Sevin®) to dust the litter and facilities.

Manual removal of fleas when necessary.

Environmental spraying with Permethrin, Deltamethrin, or Cypermethrin according to the manufacturer's instructions, with repeat treatment after 5–7 days. Supportive vitamins and strict hygiene are recommended.

## Prevention

Raise birds in wire cages at least three feet above the ground.