

Infectious Bronchitis and Small Laying Hen Flocks

If you have more than one age or type of bird in your backyard flock, you should never buy mature hens from a commercial egg farm. These old birds may be infected with Infectious Bronchitis and spread this virus to the other birds on your farm. Infectious Bronchitis can cause egg production drops, runny egg whites, and thin, rough or odd shaped egg shells. Mortality is not common in mature hens but the virus may attack the airways, oviducts or kidneys of young or unvaccinated birds.

The hens that you buy from a commercial farm have all been vaccinated against this disease but the protection is not perfect. The hens on commercial farms will appear healthy but some of them may still shed the virus. When you bring these birds home, you may bring the virus with you. Unless you also regularly vaccinate your flocks against Infectious Bronchitis, the virus can harm the other birds on your farm.

Both the broilers and eggs layers on your farm can become infected but the damage may not be immediately visible. Chicks bought from a hatchery are usually from vaccinated breeder flocks and will have two to three weeks of protection passed onto them by the mother hen. Even if the birds are infected after the hens' protection wears off, a mild cough may be the only symptom that you first see. Infectious Bronchitis, however, can depress the birds' immune systems and bacteria may start to kill them one to two weeks after the virus has hit. There is not treatment for the virus but drugs in the water may control the bacterial infection that occurs afterwards.

Not only should you avoid commercial hens, you should avoid visiting commercial egg farms. Even dropping by to buy some eggs puts you at risk of dragging the Infectious Bronchitis virus back to your farm. The virus can hide in dust or feathers that get onto your hair, clothing, hands

Shell Texture Problems Associated with Infectious Bronchitis



Sand paper texture



Rough or Odd Shaped



Ridged Shells

or footwear while you visit a commercial farm. If you must go to a commercial farm, you should shower and change into clean clothes and footwear before working with your own birds.

If you do not have any other birds on your farm, you can buy commercial pullets or layers. These birds will have been vaccinated and should not suffer severe problems from the disease. Remember that the vaccine does not offer perfect protection and you may still be unhappy with the quality of the eggs laid by these hens.