

Sick Chicken: 3-Minute Rapid Triage Protocol

Systematic observation checklist for an unresponsive, lethargic, or puffed bird

SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION PREVENTS COMMON HOME TREATMENT MISTAKES

Never force water or feed into an unresponsive bird's mouth. Isolate and assess calmly.

Minute 1: 3-Foot Distance Examination

STEP 1: OBSERVE

- PROCEDURE:** Observe bird without touching. Note stance, breathing rate, tail angle, and eyes.
- CLINICAL SIGN:** Puffed feathers, closed eyes, tail down, or neck retracted indicate systemic pain or chilling.
- KEEPER RULE:** Note if flockmates are pecking or ostracizing the bird. Prepare a dedicated warm crate.

Minute 2: Hands-On Vital Checkpoints

STEP 2: PALPATE

- PROCEDURE:** Gently check: 1. Crop (full/empty/squishy) 2. Keel bone (weight loss) 3. Vent (mites/prolapse).
- CLINICAL SIGN:** Crop should be empty in morning. Hard crop = impacted; squishy sour smelling = sour crop.
- KEEPER RULE:** Record weight in grams. Check under wings and vent feathers for active parasite clusters.

Minute 3: Safe Isolation & Thermal Support

STEP 3: STABILIZE

- PROCEDURE:** Move bird to quiet, darkened hospital crate indoors (75°F to 80°F warm environment).
- CLINICAL SIGN:** Sick birds lose body heat rapidly. Warmth conserves metabolic energy for immune defense.
- KEEPER RULE:** Offer warm water with poultry electrolytes. Never syringe fluids down throat (aspiration risk).

Minute 4: Triage Triage Decision Matrix

STEP 4: ESCALATE

- PROCEDURE:** Evaluate findings against veterinary escalation thresholds within 2 to 4 hours.
- CLINICAL SIGN:** If bird does not perk up after warming and hydration, home care is exhausted.
- KEEPER RULE:** **Call avian vet. Transport in a padded, ventilated box with towel-wrapped hot water bottle.**

IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY RED FLAGS — DO NOT WAIT

- Bird cannot hold its head up, imply twisting neck, or paralyzed in legs (Botulism or Marek's)
- Crop is rock hard or intensely foul-smelling and vomiting sour liquid when handled
- Uncontrolled bleeding from beak, vent, or predator puncture wounds
- Extreme hypothermia — bird feels cold to the touch with sunken, glazed eyes and slow gasps