

INCUBATION FYIs – Caring for your birds.

What do I do with the chicks once they have hatched?

A specific plan for disposing of the chicks should be worked out **before** undertaking an embryology project. **Never** give the chicks to the children for pets. You should try to find them homes within a few days of hatching. You should give the chicks to someone who has proper brooding facilities, experience and the interest to raise the chicks.

Planning a Home: Get in touch with the Extension service of the nearest University Animal or Poultry Science department. They usually have contacts with local farmers who might be willing to supply eggs and/or take chicks back. Finally the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals might also be able to either locate someone who will take proper care of the chicks or dispose of them humanely as a last resort.

Is there a risk of Salmonella or E. coli infections?

The risks of becoming infected by E. coli and Salmonella are minimal. Although both bacteria can be found in young fowl, transmission from chicks to humans can be essentially eliminated through careful hand washing with soap and water following contact with the eggs, chicks or litter. For more information, consult “Classroom embryology projects: Health risk myths and facts” by Pennsylvania State University doctors. <http://pa4h.cas.psu.edu/embryology.htm>

How long can eggs be stored?

Most species may be safely stored for up to 10 days before serious reductions in hatch rates are likely but it is always best to set fertile eggs in an incubator within 24-48 hours of obtaining them. Daily turning of stored eggs also helps maintain hatchability. Store eggs in cool, damp conditions. The best storage conditions are near 55°F (12°C) with 75% humidity. The vegetable area of your refrigerator is a suitable area provided the temperature does not drop below 40°F (5°C).

How long will the embryology project take?

Typically 25 days if using chicken eggs. Incubation periods vary according to species: on average 21 days for chickens, 28 days for ducks and 16-18 days for quails. To avoid week-end hatches you should set the eggs on a Tuesday or Wednesday. Unless you are intending to rear the chicks you should plan on finding them a home within a few days of hatching.

You should also run the incubator for 24 hours before setting the eggs.

Should I help chicks hatch?

You should not help the chicks from the shell. There is usually a good reason if a chick doesn't hatch. Also prematurely helping the chick hatch could cripple or infect it. Remember that after it has made a hole in the shell the chick stops piping for a few hours and rests while its lungs are getting used to the

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Information Source: Brinsea Products (<http://www.brinsea.com/products/mini.html>)

outside atmosphere. Humidity is critical at hatching time and you shouldn't open the incubator until most chicks have hatched. Don't allow your curiosity to damage your hatch.

How long can the chicks stay in the incubator before transferring to the brooder?

Since turning will have been stopped and dividers removed for hatching, the chicks will be perfectly happy in the incubator for a few hours until they are dry and fluffy. Don't open the incubator until most chicks have hatched. Opening the incubator allows moisture to escape and makes it more difficult for later chicks to hatch. Once all viable chicks have hatched you should transfer them to the brooder and place the incubator top onto the brooder base. The brooder & enclosure should have textured, absorbent litter on the floor. If the floor is slippery the chicks can damage their legs. Paper towel works best in the classroom and should be replaced daily.

How soon will the chicks need feeding?

Just before hatching chicks absorb the yolk sac which will provide nutrition for the first couple of days after hatching but they will need water straight away. You should fill the drinker up with fresh water as soon as you transfer the chicks to the brooder and start providing feed within a couple of days of hatching. Chick starter is available from any feed and garden store. Ensure that they do not run out of water and provide fresh feed and water twice every day. www.Brinsea.com

What about the brooder requirements?

Ideally the chicks should be taken out of the incubator after 24 hours (all chicks should be hatched.) Chicks need to be kept warm after they have been removed from the incubator. If you are worried about whether the chicks are warm enough the best guide is their behavior – huddled up under the lamp suggests that they need more warmth. The floor of the brooder should be covered with a material that is not slippery such as paper towels. On top of the paper towels place the bedding material.