

Poultry Operations: Associated Health Risks

Living and working near poultry operations may result in a number of health issues from breathing in air contaminants to ingesting contaminated water. This fact sheet covers some of the health hazards associated with poultry operations.

Water Quality

- Contaminants from poultry litter include, but are not limited to: excess nutrients, pathogens, antibiotics, growth hormones, heavy metals, and pesticides.¹
 - Due to such a wide range of pollutants, there are multiple associated health risks, such as infections, birth defects, antimicrobial resistance, and even death.
- Ingestion of nitrates are a major concern, as it links to blue-baby syndrome, colorectal cancer, thyroid disease, neural tube defects, spontaneous abortions and prematurity.²
- Algae growth from nutrients can create toxins that cause rashes, stomach illnesses, respiratory problems, and neurological issues.³

Air Quality

- Noxious odors and air emissions from CAFOs have been linked to psychological difficulties, including stress and low moods.⁴
- Ammonia is a frequently mentioned air contaminant of chicken farms, known for being a pungent irritant when inhaled.⁵
- Those who live closer to poultry operations that are larger and more frequent may be at an increased risk for community acquired pneumonia.⁶

Worker Safety

- Poultry industry workers may be exposed to unhealthy amounts of dusts that are filled with bacteria, particulate matter, ammonia, and other contaminants.⁷
- Worker exposure to endotoxins may lead to "toxin fever," with symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and respiratory issues.⁸
- CAFO chicken catchers have reported vomiting from odor, substance abuse, electrical hazards, low-lighting hazards, and physical strain from repetitive labor.⁹

Additional Concerns

- Houseflies may be more common in homes near poultry CAFOs, bringing with them diseases such as eye infections and intestinal illness.¹⁰
- Other vermin, such as rodents, may also be an increased concern for nearby residents.¹¹
- As a result of close working conditions, diseases like COVID-19 may spread more rapidly in slaughterhouses and pose a risk for the communities connected to these operations.¹²
- The cumulative impacts of poultry operations, often in tandem with other sources of agricultural pollutants, could place additional burdens on communities and their health.

Sources

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⁸ See #7 (Just, Natasha).

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