**Raising Healthy Chickens in Victorian Schools**

Raising chickens as part of a teaching program may be used to observe and explore the full lifecycle of a chicken. Victorian schools that would like to undertake this activity must apply to the Victorian Schools Animal Ethics Committee (VSAEC) for approval before commencing by submitting an activity application.

All teaching activities involving the use of animals must occur in accordance with the [Australian use and care of animals for scientific purposes 8th edition 2013](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ea28_code_care_use_animals_131209.pdf) (the Code).

When undertaking this type of activity, teachers must incorporate the following into their activity plan.

Before you commence the activity, you must decide what will happen to your chickens at the end of the activity.

Rehoming of animals must be in accordance with [3.4.2 and 3.4.3](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ea28_code_care_use_animals_131209.pdf) of the Code. You will need to read this section before submitting an application to VSAEC.

If you decide to keep your chickens on your school property, you may need to separate your hens from your roosters in 2 different coops (out of sight from each other), unless you want your chickens to continue breeding.

If you decide to rehome your chickens, you may want to rehome them to parents/guardians. A written commitment from each parent for all of the chickens will need to be completed before the activity commences and included in your activity application.

Will your activity begin using a chicken or an egg?

**Starting with an egg**

Pros:

* You might have the opportunity to observe hatching
* You can use a brooding hen to hatch the chicks.

Cons:

* You might miss the hatching period (could happen overnight or when the class is not present).
* You will probably have a mixture of female and male chicks. It can be difficult to rehome roosters and if you decide to keep them on your school property, they may require separation
* Some eggs may not hatch

**Starting with baby chicks**

Pros:

* You can choose to only use female chicks which may be easier to rehome.

Ethical and welfare issues surrounding any teaching activity involving chickens must be considered. The principles of **Replacement, Reduction and Refinement** should guide your activity:

* **Replacement** – where possible chickens should be replaced by, for example, models, software, or videos
* **Reduction** – use no more than the minimum number of chickens necessary. Reducing the number of chickens, however, should not be at the expense of greater suffering of individual chickens
* **Refinement** – activities must be streamlined to minimise handling, discomfort, distress or pain in chickens

An activity application needs to clearly identify the education aim of the program, how this links to the curriculum and what the teaching activities include.

Before you complete an application, you need to explore alternatives that don’t involve the use of chickens and explain in your application why they would not be suitable. See a list of potential alternatives on page 3.

**Chicken Hatching Programs**

Chicken hatching programs are not an approved teaching activity in Victorian schools as many alternatives exist that can replace the need for actual chickens.

**Chicken Hatching Program VS Raising Healthy Chickens Program**

If schools are interested in using chickens as part of a teaching program, the VSAEC encourages schools to consider a raising healthy chickens program.

Chicken hatching programs only explore a small part of a chicken’s lifecycle, usually the egg incubation and the hatching period. A chicken’s lifecycle is greater than these two periods.

Some of the issues that the VSAEC take into consideration when reviewing an activity application to use chickens as part of a teaching activity include:

1. **Use of alternatives**

Methods that replace or partially replace the use of animals must be investigated, considered and where applicable, be implemented. So if an alternative exists that replaces the need for an actual animal, schools must pursue that option. See a list of potential alternatives on page 3.

1. **The purpose of the program?**

An activity application needs to clearly identify the education aim of the program, how this links to the curriculum and what the teaching activity will involve.

Often, applications are received that state the aim of the program is to explore the lifecycle of a chicken, which links to VCSSU043 Living things grow, change and have offspring similar to themselves but the activity itself only observes the incubation and hatching period. This type of application would not be approved as the aim of the program and the curriculum don’t align with the teaching activity.

1. **Rehoming of chickens at the end of a program**

When reviewing an activity application, the VSAEC are obliged by the Code to ensure the ongoing wellbeing of the animal once the activity has been completed. Many schools experience difficulty in finding a home for their chickens that ensures their ongoing welfare, this is especially true for roosters. Often, this can result in unwanted chickens being killed. It is also uncommon for egg farmers to accept unvaccinated chickens into their existing livestock at the risk of biohazard contamination.

If you would like to rehome your chickens to your students’ parents or guardians, safeguards must include a written commitment from a parent or guardian for the provision of adequate, ongoing and responsible care of the animal, and demonstrating an awareness of relevant legislative requirements regarding the animal being rehomed

Schools need to provide detailed information in their application that clearly demonstrates how the ongoing welfare of the chicken is guaranteed once they have been rehomed.

**Alternatives to Chicken Hatching Programs**

**Other Alternatives**

* Plants, stick insects and zebra fish also provide an excellent living resource to enable observation of growth, change, lifecycles, needs of living things and other outcomes teachers hope to achieve when they use a chicken hatching program.
* Organise for a mobile animal farm with chickens of all different ages to visit your school to explore the lifecycle of a chicken as part of an explicit teaching activity.
* Consider a raising healthy chickens program where chickens are permanently homed on school grounds in a safe a secure environment. This could be part of an educational program, or they could be school pets.

**Online Videos**

Chicken hatching videos available on YouTube:

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHLH91zzsXQ>
* <http://www.teachertube.com/video/chicken-egg-hatching-97047>
* <http://www.msichicago.org/online-science/videos/video-detail/activities/the-hatchery/>
* <http://www.primarygames.com/holidays/easter/videos/chick-hatching-from-egg/>

**Teaching Aids**

Chicken life cycle exploration set of eggs kit

* <http://www.teaching.com.au/servlet/au.mta.ns.is.ItemDetailServlet?KEY_ITEM=LER2733&KEY_ALIAS=LER2733>
* <https://www.learningresources.com/product/teachers/shop+by+subject/science/product+category/life/animals+-+plants/chick+life+cycle+exploration+set.do>
* <http://www.amazon.com/Learning-Resources-Chick-Cycle-Exploration/dp/B001SCA71G>

There is also an iPad application called [iHatch-Chickens *(©2012 iHatch-Apps)*](https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/ihatch-chickens/id568038907?mt=8)which can be used to see the development of a chick inside an egg and to the point of hatching.

There are posters and models available from scientific resource suppliers. The [Australian Poultry Cooperative Research Centre](http://www.poultryhub.org/education/primary-secondary-schools/) has developed a kit that is designed to teach students about the keeping of poultry and this includes detail on the lifecycle of a chicken and the needs of chicks and chickens.

**Lesson Plans**

* RSPCA - [Beaks, Wings and Feet](http://www.woaw.org.au/teachers/beak-wings-feet-rspca-lesson/)
* United Poultry Concerns – [Hatching Good Lessons](http://www.upc-online.org/hatching/alternatives.html)