



What is your meconium score?

If chicks are held in the hatcher for too long, they do not grow as well in the broiler house.

A good way to tell if this is happening is to check how many of the eggs in a hatcher basket are stained with meconium (the dark green first droppings of the chick).

To find out what your meconium score is, pick out the 5 dirtiest eggs from each of 5 hatcher trays per flock. Select the eggs immediately after the chicks are removed from the hatcher. Score the eggs against the 5-point scale shown below.

If the dirtiest eggs are in groups 4 or 5, then the chicks are being left in the hatcher for too long. Delay the next set by 3 hours and make a note to check again when these eggs hatch in 3 weeks time. When you check them, if there are still eggs in groups 4 or 5 you will need to delay the next set by a further 3 hours.

If all the eggs are clean, check that your total incubation time is not too short – this would be indicated by wet chicks in each hatcher basket and, if very short, live pipped embryos.

If your meconium scores vary from tray to tray, setter temperatures may be variable.

Use the meconium scores to adjust setting times so that clean eggs predominate on every tray.

Remember to check every hatch – flock age, egg age, and season can all affect the total incubation time.

INCUBATION TIME TOO LONG

- 5 or more dirty eggs per tray
- All chicks dry at time of chick take-off

INCUBATION TIME TOO SHORT

- Clean egg shells in hatch debris
- Some chicks still wet
- Live pipped embryos

