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Introduction

Infectious bronchitis is a highly contagious, acute, economic viral disease of chickens that is caused by a coronavirus. Infection with infectious bronchitis is by inhalation or by direct contact with infected poultry, contaminated litter, equipment or other fomites. Vertical transmission via the embryo has not been reported but the virus can be found on the surface of the eggshell.

Infectious bronchitis is a global disease that is found wherever there are chickens. In broilers this disease is characterised by a deterioration in weight gain and FCR and it predisposes broilers to secondary bacterial infections.

In breeders and egg layers, infection is associated with egg drops and eggshell and albumen changes.

Infectious bronchitis was first observed in the USA in 1930 when it was basically a disease of young birds, but as time progressed the disease spread to older and older birds. Egg production problems were first seen in the 1940s and kidney involvement in the 1960s. A viral cause was defined in 1936 and vaccines were first developed in the late 1950s.

Coronaviruses very similar to infectious bronchitis virus have been isolated from various species of birds including pheasants, turkeys, guinea fowl, partridge and pea fowl.

Distribution

Infectious bronchitis is a global entity. In many countries several serotypes are encountered and, as the virus is constantly evolving, new serotypes are encountered from time to time. The original serotype is known as the Massachusetts type. Nowadays, dozens of serotypes are known.

The disease can occur in vaccinated flocks and when this happens the disease causing strain is usually different from the vaccinal strain. That is, cross protection from vaccinal strains is variable.

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