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Age of host

Infectious bronchitis virus can infect all ages of chicken but the disease is most severe in young birds. As birds get older, they become more resistant to nephropathogenic effects, oviduct lesions (in young, immature birds 'blind layers' are caused by infectious bronchitis infection) and mortality.

Transmission

Infectious bronchitis spreads rapidly among susceptible chickens as it is a highly contagious disease with a short incubation period – susceptible birds placed among infected birds will show clinical signs in 24-48 hours with large numbers of virus particles seen in trachea, lungs, kidneys and bursa of Fabricius 24 hours post infection.

The frequency of viral isolations from birds declines with time and virus has been isolated from caecal tonsils and faeces at 14 and 20 weeks post infection respectively. It has been shown that vaccine virus can persist in internal organs for 163 days or more and during this time intermittent shedding may occur.

Infectious bronchitis virus has been found in other (wild) avian species and this may play a role in disease spread.

Clinical signs

Gasping, coughing, sneezing, tracheal rales and nasal discharge are all commonly seen in infectious bronchitis. Occasionally, wet eyes and swollen sinuses are seen and birds typically look depressed and huddle. Food consumption and hence weight gain are both reduced. Chickens afflicted by nephropathogenic strains appear to recover from the respiratory stage and then become depressed with ruffled feathers, wet droppings and mortality. Urolithiasis (renal disease) is sometimes seen in layer flocks.

In laying flocks egg drops are seen as well as an increase in reject eggs, a loss of shell colour and watery whites. Restoration of normal egg production can take up to eight weeks.

When female chicks are infected at day old oviduct damage can occur resulting in blocked oviducts and no egg production (blind layers).

Mortality is variable and lesions include tracheitis with exudate, frothy air sacculitis, swollen and pale kidneys and, in birds in lay, yolk material in the abdominal cavity.

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