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## Introduction

Hexamitiasis or infectious catarrhal enteritis of turkey poults is caused by a protozoan parasite that was known as Hexamita, but which is today known as *Spironucleus meleagridis*. The disease has been seen in several countries and *S. meleagridis* has also been found in pheasants, quail, partridge and peafowl.

## The parasite

*S. meleagridis* is a flagellated protozoon and its eight prominent flagella include four anterior, two anterolateral and two posterior ones.

## Clinical signs and pathology

Poults affected by hexamitiasis show no specific clinical signs but they succumb to a watery diarrhoea which can become yellowish in the later stages of the disease. General clinical signs include nervousness, listlessness and convulsions and coma late on in the disease.

Lesions include a catarrhal enteritis that is accompanied by atony which results in dilation of the intestine, especially in its upper reaches. Large numbers of *S. meleagridis* can be seen in the watery intestinal contents and the intestinal crypts. This parasite dies off quickly after bird death so it is best to look for it in birds which were in extremis and were euthanised immediately before sampling.

Diagnosis is made on the basis of a watery diarrhoea and the demonstration of *S. meleagridis* in the duodenal contents. However, it should be noted that survivors can become carriers and so the parasite can be encountered in apparently healthy birds.

## Treatment

There is no vaccine. Treatment can be undertaken with chlortetracycline or butynorate. This should be supported by good hygiene, management and nutrition.