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Host range

Spirochaetes have been found in the recta and caeca of a variety of birds including chickens, turkeys, geese, grouse, pheasants, partridges, rheas, ostriches and a variety of wild birds, especially waterfowl.

Geographical spread

Intestinal spirochaetosis has been seen in Europe, North America and Australia. UK, Dutch and Australian surveys have found this condition to be common in table egg layers and broiler breeders. Avian spirochaetes are found more frequently in scouring or 'wet litter' flocks than in healthy flocks and tends to be more common in older flocks (possibly as a consequence of build up in levels of infection in the flock). Colonisation with intestinal spirochaetes is commonly associated with depressed egg production.

The disease

Intestinal spirochaetes colonise the rectum and caeca. It would appear that lack of a protective immunity means that colonisation can be prolonged or occur more than once.

Transmission between birds is via the faeco-oral route and transmission via aerosol transmission is likely to occur between birds that are close to each other. Wild birds, vermin, insects and other animals, for example dogs, should be regarded as possible vectors for introducing this disease into a flock.

The incubation period is variable. Wheat based diets tend to favour colonisation.

Clinical signs

This disease can often be mild and inapparent with the only signs being a slight increase in water consumption or a slight depression in egg production. Co-infection with other microbes (protozoa, bacteria or viruses) frequently occurs and should always be considered as a possibility.

Laying hens show slimy, wet, frothy faeces with an elevated fat content or just have wet droppings. Eggs from birds experiencing an egg drop tend to be slightly lighter in weight and have paler yolks.

A typhlitis caused by *Brachyspira alvinipulli* has been seen in geese associated with high mortality (25-30%).