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Introduction

In poultry tuberculosis, which is sometimes called mycobacteriosis and often shortened to just TB or avian TB, is caused by *Mycobacterium avium*. Avian tuberculosis is a chronic, contagious disease that persists in a flock.

In many countries avian tuberculosis is rarely seen in large commercial flocks but it is seen from time to time in backyard flocks. In some countries it is re-emerging in free range flocks.

Avian tuberculosis can occur in man and so this disease has a public health significance.

History

This disease was first described in chickens in the 1880s. This is a disease which declined with the housing and integration of poultry. The disease is an important one in wild bird collections (probably due in part to the age of many birds in such collections).

Clinical signs

Unthriftiness, depressed egg production and death are the commonly seen signs. Occasionally comb and wattles have a bluish colour. Signs of jaundice are seen when there is severe liver involvement.

Once the bird has become emaciated it is usually possible to feel nodular masses in the abdominal cavity along the intestines. Often there is a unilateral lameness due to a tuberculous arthritis.

Pathology

Tubercular lesions are commonly seen in the liver, spleen, intestines and bone marrow (in all granuloma formation is usually seen) and less frequently in heart, ovaries, testes and skin. Livers and spleens are enlarged and hence more prone to rupture, which usually results in a fatal haemorrhage.

Ingestion of *M. avium* results in intestinal infection with eventual spread into the blood system. Transmission of *M. avium* around the body via the blood results in lesions in a variety of organs.