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History

The advent of new microbiological identification technologies resulted in most streptococci, which had previously been called Lancefield group D streptococci, being reclassified as Enterococcus. Between the 1940s and 1970s there were various reports of faecal streptococci infections in poultry which, with the wisdom of hindsight, were probably enterococcal infections.

Aetiology

Enterococci are Gram positive spherical bacteria which, when viewed under the microscope, can be seen as single, paired or short chained spheres (cocci). 'Enterococcus' means 'of the gut'.

There are various Enterococcus Spp that have been found in birds associated with disease including *E. faecalis*, *E. faecium*, *E. durans*, *E. avium*, *E. hirae* and *E. cecorum*.

E. faecalis, *E. faecium*, *E. durans* and *E. hirae* have all been associated with bacterial endocarditis. *E. faecalis* is the enterococcus most frequently associated with infections in poultry.

Epidemiology

E. faecalis affects poultry species of all ages and contaminated hatching eggs result in infected embryos and day old chicks. *E. faecium* can cause disease in ducklings.

Enterococci typically infect birds via the oral and aerosol routes; the latter often causing a severe septicaemia after experimental infection. In cage layers infection via skin wounds is seen. Concurrent enteritis often allows enterococci into the bird's body with septicaemia and/or endocarditis ensuing.

Incubation periods range from days to weeks.

Enterococcus Spp have been associated with brain necrosis and encephalomalacia in young chicks.

Clinical signs

There are two forms of enterococcal disease – acute and subacute, which often becomes chronic. In the former the signs are those of a septicaemia, namely depression, lethargy, pale combs and wattles, diarrhoea, fine head tremors and loss of egg production. In the latter depression, loss of weight, lameness and head tremors may be seen.

Enterococcal egg transmission or faecal contamination of hatching eggs can result in late embryonic mortality and chicks failing to pip.