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Introduction

Haemorrhagic enteritis of turkeys is an acute viral disease that affects turkeys over one month of age. Typically bloody droppings are seen and birds die. This disease was first seen in Minnesota, USA and reached an epidemic level in some of the USA's turkey states in the 1960s.

Aetiology

Haemorrhagic enteritis virus is an adenovirus that is closely related to the marble spleen disease virus and the avian adenovirus, which causes splenomegaly in broiler breeders. This group of viruses is serologically distinct and are now referred to as siadenoviruses. The haemorrhagic enteritis virus remains very stable under a variety of conditions. The virus can remain viable in faeces for several weeks and the disease commonly recurs on infected premises.

The disease

Mortality varies from almost nothing to 60% and the disease has been seen in all the turkey raising areas of the world. Haemorrhagic enteritis is rarely seen in birds under six weeks of age and typically occurs between 6-11 weeks of age. In turkeys the incubation period is 5-6 days.

Clinically affected birds show depression and bloody faeces over a 24 hour period. Bloody faecal material is often seen around the vent. In those birds that survive, clinical signs subside in just over a week. Due to the heavy blood loss, birds that die in the acute stage often look pale. Birds recovering from this disease have a good protective immunity.

Post mortem findings

Birds are typically in a good bodily condition, but their small intestines are distended with blood. The intestinal wall is congested and may be covered by a fibrinonecrotic membrane. Spleens are enlarged and mottled.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is by clinical and post mortem findings and by demonstration of the causal virus. The differential diagnosis includes lymphoid neoplasias, such as reticuloendotheliosis or lymphoproliferative disease, acute bacteraemias, such as colisepticaemia and erysipelas, highly pathogenic Newcastle disease, bacterial endotoxaemias, acute coccidiosis and various toxicities.

Control

Vaccination has been successfully used.

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