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Water risks

All poultry drink water several times a day. This makes the water supply a very effective vehicle for spreading infection.

Sources of contamination

The original water supply can be contaminated, usually by faecal material (droppings) but sometimes by wild birds. A good example of this occurred in Minnesota in the 1950s and 1960s. Turkeys reared on the range had access to ponds and lakes which had become contaminated with the droppings of wild waterfowl. These turkeys often experienced influenza and the problem disappeared when they were housed and put on to a different water supply.

There have been various instances of juices seeping out from a dead bird pit and contaminating the subterranean water supply that the farm relied on. This carried disease into subsequent flocks. This has occurred in Africa with *E. coli* and *Salmonella enteritidis* in Eastern Europe.

Sometimes another animal is infected by drinking contaminated water and then takes the infection into the poultry flock. A good example of this was in America where salmonella contaminated river water via an effluent outflow from a community. This contaminated river water was drunk by rats downstream, who then took the infection into the poultry house and infected the chickens.

Infection can also be spread within a house, for example nasal discharge from turkeys with turkey rhinotracheitis can contaminate water in bell drinkers, which then infects other turkeys.

Control of disease spread via the water

The original source of water is the first point of control. Avoid using pond, lake or river water. If you have to use such water then always treat it, for example by chlorination.

Then you need to check how the water gets from its source to your birds and identify any input points where contamination could occur. Such points include damaged pipes. However the more likely points are site storage tanks and header tanks, both of which, if their covers are not properly fixed, can have their water contaminated by faecal material (wild birds, rats, mice, lizards) and by animals that fall into the tanks, die and decompose. Remember rats and cats carry *Pasteurella* Spp., many animals carry *Salmonella* Spp. and wild birds can carry various avian pathogens.

So, a key part of any biosecurity programme is to ensure that the lids on such tanks are complete and always secured.

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