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Introduction

Reticuloendotheliosis covers a group of conditions caused by the reticuloendotheliosis virus (REV) group of retroviruses. The disease conditions associated with reticuloendotheliosis include a runting syndrome which was seen following the administration of REV contaminated vaccine, a chronic neoplasia of lymphoid and other tissues and an acute reticulum cell neoplasia.

The initial isolation of a REV (strain T) occurred in 1957 from a turkey with visceral lymphomas. The T strain was shown to be oncogenic (tumour forming). This T strain REV was shown to be related to chicken syncytial virus, spleen necrosis virus and duck infectious anaemia virus, so these were all grouped together in an REV group.

Distribution and incidence

REV infection is common in turkeys, ducks, chickens and geese. The number of seropositive flocks and their proportion of seropositive birds increases with age. In contrast, the number of birds showing REV related clinical disease is sporadic or negligible.

Chronic neoplasia associated with REV is rare. Cases of lymphomas in turkeys and their losses from mortality and processing condemnations can be as high as 20%. Lymphomas associated with REV infection in chickens and chronic neoplasia associated with REV has been reported in ducks, quail, pheasants, geese and some other species of birds.

Transmission

REV can be transmitted by physical contact but this appears to be influenced by host species and viral strain. Contamination from the environment is possible. REVs are quickly degraded outside the host bird. Insect transmission may occur.

Chickens, turkeys and ducks with persistent viraemias may transmit REVs to their progeny but at a low frequency.

Transmission has occurred via contaminated vaccines.

Clinical signs

Chickens with the runting syndrome are stunted and pale. Weight depression has also been seen in ducks. Some chickens may have abnormal feather development or Nakanuke.

Mortality is rare in chickens but it is common practice to cull affected birds. Birds developing lymphomas often show nothing except depression.

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