

Paramyxovirus of Pigeons



Information Leaflet for Pigeon Owners

www.agriculture.gov.ie



Introduction

The purpose of this information leaflet is to increase awareness about pigeon paramyxovirus. Highly pathogenic pigeon paramyxovirus can cause Newcastle disease in poultry.

Geographical distribution of the disease

Pigeon paramyxovirus occurs worldwide in wild birds. A worldwide pandemic in pigeons occurred in the 1980s. Outbreaks in racing pigeons occur sporadically in Ireland. The last outbreak of Newcastle disease in poultry caused by pigeon paramyxovirus in Ireland was in 1992.

Affected species

Pigeon paramyxovirus infects both domestic and wild birds. Chickens are very susceptible to disease.

Methods of transmission

The virus is found in droppings and respiratory secretions from infected birds. It can readily contaminate and be transmitted on equipment, feed, bedding, dead birds and people, on hands and clothing. Infected pigeons pose a high risk of infection to the Irish poultry industry.

Public health risk

Pigeon paramyxovirus rarely causes disease in humans. The virus may cause conjunctivitis, and very occasionally a mild, self-limiting flu-like disease. Simple hygiene precautions, such as not touching your face and washing your hands when handling birds, can prevent infection.

Clinical signs in birds

Some of all of the following:

- **Dull, depressed birds, off feed**
- **Drop in egg production**
- **Pale, soft shelled or misshapen eggs**
- **Respiratory signs – gasping**
- **Bright green watery diarrhoea**
- **Bluish discoloured wattles**
- **Nervous signs – tremors, dropped wings, twisted necks, paralysis**
- **Unusual deaths**

What to do if you suspect disease

Pigeon paramyxovirus is a **notifiable** disease. Any suspicions of the disease must be reported immediately to the local District Veterinary Office (see list of local offices under “Contact Us” on the Department of Agriculture’s website at: www.agriculture.gov.ie). Pigeon owners should familiarise themselves with the clinical signs of the disease.

In the event of suspicion:

- Birds must not be moved to or from the loft until sample results have ruled out the disease
- The movement of bird carcasses, products, eggs, droppings, litter, bird waste or equipment used in connection with birds may only take place under licence.

What happens if pigeon paramyxovirus is confirmed?

If pigeon paramyxovirus is confirmed in a **pigeon loft**:

- Birds must be kept in the loft for 60 days after clinical signs disappear
- The loft must be cleaned and disinfected

If Newcastle disease is confirmed in **poultry**:

- All poultry on the infected holding will be killed
- A 10km restricted zone will be declared around the holding
- Controls on the poultry industry will apply in the zone for at least 30 days
- Gathering of birds (including pigeon racing) may be affected

Measures that you can take to protect your pigeons

- Vaccinate all pigeons in the loft every year
- Fully comply with legislation when importing and racing birds
- Isolate imported, new and stray birds
- Monitor your birds carefully
- If your birds are unwell, keep them inside and contact your private veterinary practitioner

Vaccination

- **Vaccinate all pigeons every year (including stock, breeding, showing, training and racing birds)**
- **Vaccinate young birds as soon as possible after weaning**
- **Only use an authorised pigeon vaccine**
- **Only use vaccine from an authorised reputable source**
- **It is illegal to train, race or show pigeons that have not been vaccinated**
- **Non-compliance will result in severe penalties**

In the event of an outbreak, further information will be provided on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food’s website at: www.agriculture.gov.ie

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