

Avian Paramyxovirus (APMV1) in Pigeons

What species are at risk?

The Avian Paramyxovirus type 1 (APMV-1) recently detected in Tasmania in June 2013 affects pigeons and can cause high levels of mortality. It is also known as pigeon paramyxovirus. Owners of both racing pigeons and show or fancy pigeons should vaccinate their birds against APMV1.

The risk of this disease getting into poultry is negligible. There were several outbreaks of APMV1 in pigeons in Victoria in 2011 and 2012 and there was no evidence of disease in poultry. Current evidence suggests that chickens are not susceptible to this strain of virus. Even so, it is a good opportunity to remind everyone with poultry should ensure they are practising good biosecurity to minimise the risk to their birds.

Feral pigeons are susceptible to APMV1.

Experience in the Victorian and NSW outbreaks in 2011 and 2012 is that the risk to other species is extremely low. Single cases have been reported in Victoria in a collared sparrowhawk and a spotted turtle dove. No clinical signs have been reported in poultry or aviary birds in contact with infected pigeons in Australia.

What is Avian Paramyxovirus ?

It is a viral disease of pigeons related to Newcastle disease and has similar signs.

What are the signs of Avian Paramyxovirus ?

The first signs can include lethargy (ie a reluctance to leave the loft), being off colour, greenish watery droppings, reduced appetite and increased thirst. In some cases, affected birds can also show respiratory

signs and/or neurological signs (eg shaking of the head, tumbling when landing etc) .

Deaths typically start occurring one to three days after these first signs.

Mortality rates can be high, but that is not always the case. Mortality rates in the various outbreaks in NSW and Victoria in 2012 ranged from 10% to 100%.

Please note : The incubation period can be up to 4 weeks. This means that birds appearing normal can be infected and therefore infectious.

Can infected birds be treated ?

There is no treatment that cures APMV1. However, supportive treatment of sick birds may reduce the severity of the disease and improve the chances of survival. Anyone with this disease in their pigeons should seek veterinary advice on supportive treatments. They should also report the disease to the DPIPW.

Is vaccination effective ?

Yes. The experience from the Victorian and NSW outbreaks of APMV1 is that the vaccine does protect against this disease. Pigeon owners should ensure all their birds are vaccinated.

The vaccine permitted to be used for pigeons in Tasmania is inactivated Newcastle disease vaccine.

Where do I get the vaccine?

While the inactivated Newcastle disease vaccine is registered for use in poultry, its use in pigeons is an off label use. To ensure the vaccine is used correctly please contact your veterinarian or pigeon club for advice. They will also be able to advise you where you can source the vaccine.

Is Avian Paramyxovirus a risk to human health?

Human infection with this virus is extremely rare and usually occurs only in people who have close direct contact with infected birds. The virus causes only mild, short-term conjunctivitis or influenza – like symptoms in humans. If you have contact with infected birds and experience these symptoms please contact your doctor.

Is Avian Paramyxovirus a risk to pets ?

No. It is not a risk to dogs, cats or any other non-avian pets.

What should pigeon owners do to protect their birds from Avian Paramyxovirus ?

Since the outbreaks of this disease in Victoria in 2011, DPIPWE and Tasmania's pigeon racing clubs have been strongly encouraging pigeon owners to vaccinate their birds against this disease. Many have done so and they have thereby taken the most important step in protecting their birds.

Anyone who has not yet vaccinated their birds against Avian Paramyxovirus should do so without further delay.

As well as vaccination, owners should practise good biosecurity in the day to day management of their flock:

- Prevent wild birds accessing your birds' feed and water supply;
- Prevent stray pigeons and wild birds coming into close contact with your birds;
- Isolate and closely monitor introduced birds for 4 weeks;
- Clean and disinfect travelling boxes and other equipment in between uses.

What should a pigeon owners do if they suspect Avian Paramyxovirus in their birds ?

They should seek veterinary help straightaway so that a proper diagnosis can be made. If it is APMV1 , the veterinarian will be able to advise on the supportive treatments that will maximise the chances of affected birds surviving. You should also report the disease to the DPIPWE on 6233 6875.

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