
13 February 2017

Rotavirus pigeon disease

A novel highly infectious disease caused by a rotavirus has been detected in racing and non-racing pigeons in several Australian states, including New South Wales (NSW). Genetic testing has confirmed that the virus that caused the outbreak in Victoria in December 2016 is the same virus that caused the outbreak in Western Australia (WA) in May 2016.

Outbreaks in Victoria and South Australia appear linked to a sale that occurred six months after the initial outbreak in WA. This means that apparently healthy birds from affected lofts are capable of shedding virus and transmitting infection for at least six months ('carriers').

Currently, there is no suitable vaccine to prevent rotavirus infection available in Australia or overseas. An Australian-produced vaccine could be available by the end of 2017 or early 2018.

There is no evidence to suggest a link between pigeon paramyxovirus type 1 (PPMV1) vaccines and the rotavirus pigeon disease. DPI recommends the continued use of PPMV1 vaccines in consultation with your flock veterinarian.

Biosecurity recommendations for the pigeon industry in NSW include:

- Avoid mixing pigeons (e.g. racing, shows, sales) from unaffected and affected lofts until there is a suitable rotavirus vaccine available in Australia
- Any pigeon fancier whose loft has been affected by rotavirus infection should maintain strict biosecurity measures, including (but not limited to) not selling pigeons to unaffected lofts, loft hygiene and visitor restrictions to prevent the spread of the rotavirus
- Pigeon fanciers in unaffected areas should maintain strict biosecurity measures, including (but not limited to) no pigeon introductions from affected lofts, cleaning and disinfection of second hand equipment, visitor restrictions and cleaning clothing/boots after contact with other pigeons to prevent the entry and spread of the rotavirus

Private veterinarians who treat pigeons should assess risks and take steps to prevent the spread of rotavirus especially if they admit sick or dead pigeons.

Protecting pigeon welfare should be a priority consideration in all decisions regarding the management of the rotavirus pigeon disease issue.

It is not known what impact the rotavirus may have on other bird populations e.g. poultry industry, native pigeons, doves. Feral pigeons are likely to be susceptible to the rotavirus. Please contact Claire Harrison (claire.harrison@dpi.nsw.gov.au or 02 6391 3490) or Kate Wingett (kate.wingett@dpi.nsw.gov.au or 02 6391 3717) to notify of any wild (feral or native) pigeon mortalities.