Western Canadian Animal Health Network

WECAHN POULTRY NETWORK PRODUCER SUMMARY

July - September 2025

The WeCAHN Poultry Network held a quarterly videoconference meeting on November 27th to discuss animal health events occurring from July to September with veterinary practitioners, diagnosticians, veterinary college faculty, researchers, and industry representatives. Data were synthesized from clinical impressions surveys completed by practitioners and laboratory submissions from Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS), and the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).

2) Interesting Cases

Clinical case: Hen diuresis syndrome.

Several layer and broiler breeder flocks showed ongoing watery droppings, skin irritation around the vent, and scalding lesions due to excessive urination, but birds stayed in production. Post-mortem exams showed normal kidneys, suggesting a functional issue rather than kidney disease. Similar problems have been seen after feed changes, especially higher-protein grain additions, and water quality was flagged as a possible factor. Cold barn conditions causing cramping and diarrhea may also contribute, highlighting the value of reviewing feed, water, and environment when this pattern appears.

Clinical case: Internal cloacal damage and impaction

Laying hens and broiler breeders, including males, developed severe internal cloacal inflammation and firm blockages, with little change to the outside skin. Some birds died. Postmortems confirmed birds were eating litter material (e.g. sawdust), and producers observed excessive hunger and active bedding consumption. Reduced fiber in diets and increased activity or aggression in new flocks were noted as possible drivers, along with caution about certain wood shavings that may irritate the guts. The cases emphasize close monitoring of litter type, feed composition, and abnormal eating behavior.

Clinical case: “Flightiness” (hysteria) in layers due to LED light flickering

A free-run layer flock experienced repeated panic events, broken eggs, and internal infections, despite no obvious barn problems. Slow-motion video revealed subtle LED light flicker that could not be seen by eye. Replacing the faulty lights stopped the abnormal behavior, confirming birds are more sensitive to light flicker than people. This case highlights the importance of checking lighting systems when unexplained panic or sudden behavior changes occur.

2) Syndromic and Laboratory Surveillance

Respiratory disease remained uncommon across poultry types and was generally stable this quarter. Respiratory problems linked to infectious bronchitis, ILT, and Mycoplasma were reported at low levels in broilers, breeders, layers, and turkeys, with no clear increase overall. Laboratory results showed respiratory detections stayed within expected ranges, with occasional findings involving *E. coli* alongside viral infections. Overall patterns suggest no major change in respiratory disease pressure at the flock level.

Digestive disease remained an important issue, especially in broilers, but overall trends were mostly stable. Enteritis, coccidiosis, and liver-related disease were commonly reported, with infectious bursal disease (IBD) and inclusion body hepatitis (IBH) appearing stable to slightly increasing in broilers, including variant strains. Laboratory testing showed digestive pathogens largely within normal levels, with ongoing detection of *Enterococcus* species and occasional viral enteritis. Digestive disease continues to be a key management concern, particularly for young birds.

Reproductive disease occurred at low but consistent levels in breeders and layers. Reduced production, abnormal eggs, and reproductive infections were mainly linked to bacterial causes such as *E. coli*, with trends remaining stable. Laboratory findings did not exceed expected levels, indicating no emerging reproductive disease issues this quarter.

Musculoskeletal disease remained a regular issue, particularly bacterial lameness in broilers and broiler-breeders, but overall trends were stable. Lameness linked to bacterial infection, including *Staphylococcus* species and *E. coli*, continued to be reported, while viral and nutritional causes stayed low. Laboratory data showed a sustained increase and occasional bone disorders, likely influenced by higher submission numbers. These findings reinforce the ongoing impact of leg health on welfare and productivity.

Multisystemic and metabolic disease remained a significant concern, especially early-life bacterial infections. Early systemic infections and yolk sac infections were common in broilers and present in other bird types, with trends stable to increasing and frequently associated with *E. coli*. Laboratory results showed colibacillosis increasing above normal levels, while other conditions such as Marek's disease and heart inflammation remained stable. *Salmonella* detections across poultry types stayed within expected ranges.

3) CFIA poultry condemnations

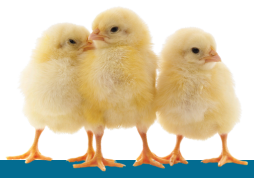
Analysis of federal condemnation data showed several province-level trends but limited practical clarity for producers. In British Columbia, liver-related condemnations declined from above normal levels in 2020–2021 to consistently below expected levels since early 2024, while respiratory-related condemnations peaked in 2022–2024 but have been stable since mid-2024. In Alberta, total condemnations showed repeated peaks above normal levels, including a recent increase in 2025, alongside a clear rising trend in subcutaneous condition condemnations that exceeded expected levels in 2025. In Saskatchewan and Manitoba, total condemnations were generally stable except for a peak in 2022, while respiratory condemnations showed periodic spikes and subcutaneous condemnations have steadily increased since 2020, exceeding normal levels in 2025.

Practitioners noted that broad condemnation categories and lack of clear definitions limit usefulness for flock management, as rates can change with inspection practices; follow-up with CFIA on category definitions is planned, and future reporting will depend on improved clarity.

4) Scan

Avian metapneumovirus (aMPV) Illness has been observed in vaccinated turkey flocks in Ontario and Québec, mainly before booster vaccination, with subtype A detected. Issues appear concentrated in Eastern Canada, and illness severity varies depending on other health problems in the flock.

A new vaccine option against **Infectious bronchitis virus (IBV)** is available in Canada: IBron® (CEVA) and producers and veterinarians were reminded to monitor for circulating IBV strains.



Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI, H5N1)
The current HPAI wave started earlier than usual, with most Canadian poultry cases reported in Western Canada, especially British Columbia and Alberta, and mainly in commercial flocks. Wild bird detections remain widespread, increasing the risk of spillover into poultry, while no cases have been detected in Canadian dairy cattle or milk. Strong biosecurity, early recognition of illness and rapid reporting remain critical to poultry producers.

The US continues to detect cases in dairy cows and poultry. One new human case was reported in Washington state.

A Canadian research team confirmed HPAI transmission to dairy goats and their suckling kids including drop in milk production and changes to milk quality. Other research team confirmed HPAI transmission to wild pigs in Alberta.

Producer Takeaways:

New health issues: Some flocks have experienced unusual conditions like excessive urination in hens, severe cloaca problems, and flighty behavior linked to flickering lights. These cases show how feed, water, housing, and barn environment can affect flock health.

Ongoing disease monitoring: Common poultry diseases like IBV, aMPV, Mycoplasma, and coccidiosis are still present. Most flocks remain stable, but labs sometimes find new strains or mixed infections that can affect bird health.

Avian influenza trends: H5N1 avian influenza continues to occur in western North America. While human cases are rare, research shows the virus can spread to other animals such as goats and wild pigs, emphasizing the importance of biosecurity.

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