



The WeCAHN poultry network met 28th February 2025 to discuss poultry health in western Canada during Q4 (October-December 2024) with veterinary practitioners, laboratory diagnosticians, researchers, and provincial veterinarians in attendance.

## Overview

Data sources in this report include:

1. Clinical Impressions Surveys completed by network practitioners.
2. Data shared by western veterinary diagnostic laboratories: Manitoba Veterinary Services Diagnostic Laboratory (VSDL), Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), and University of Calgary College of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).
3. Western condemnation data from federal abattoirs.
4. AI testing in domestic poultry and wild birds

## Interesting cases

### Serious toe-pecking in commercial cage layers

#### History:

- Cage layer operation is losing birds bleeding out due to toe-pecking. Problem started in November 2024.
- Area targeted is the web between the toes.
- This is occurring in ~ 3-4% of the birds.



Photos: Kindly provided by Dr. Victoria Bowes, Canadian Poultry Consultants

#### Treatment:

- Dropped light. This becomes problematic eventually, since as the light is lowered eventually production is reduced.
- Added red light.
- Salt is widely discussed as potentially contributing to this problem so the ration was investigated but found not to be a problem.
- Genetics may be a contributing factor and the producer is planning not to repeat use of this particular line.
- Nutritional supplementation.

**QUESTION 1:** Is the problem occurring in all areas of the barn?

**ANSWER:** Cases are distributed randomly around the barn.

**COMMENT:** We've seen this kind of lesions between the toes in the past, and found it responded to supplementing B vitamins.

**ANSWER:** We've flooded these birds with vitamins and probiotics.

### High mortality due to intestinal impactions in broiler breeders following adding hay bales for enrichment

**History:** Traditional broiler-breeder flock started placing hay bales in the scratch area for enrichment. Mortality attributable to stomach obstructions of 3-4 cm across, consisting of long strands of hay, rose to ~ 5%. Contributing factor may be that the body condition strategy is to keep lean and therefore hungry. So the birds would eat the hay provided.

**QUESTION:** What age were the birds?

**ANSWER:** About 42 weeks when we became involved, but the hay placement and obstruction problems were recent.

**Takeaway:** If hay is being provided for enrichment, it must be shredded to reduce potential for impactions.

## Syndromic Surveillance

Network practitioners complete a survey which captures whether they have identified selected conditions:

- **Never**
- **Rarely** (1-2 times over the 3 months)
- **Commonly** (1-2 times per month)
- **Very frequently** (3+ times per month)



### Layers

**Conditions seen frequently** by the group (referring to conditions reported Commonly or Very frequently by 2 or more of 4 practitioners completing this section of the report):

**Aggression and Cannibalism** was reported **Never** (n=1) to **Rarely** (n=1) to **Commonly** (n=2) and rated Stable by three and **Increasing** by one network practitioner, associated with aviary birds.

**QUESTION:** What's associated with the increase in aggression and cannibalism reported?

**ANSWER:** We've had aviary birds ordered inside since last fall. Aware of 3 of these flocks seeing more aggression etc. and associated with increased mortalities due to bleedouts.

**QUESTION:** are you seeing stressors associated with keeping flocks in production longer, and if so, how are you responding?

**ANSWER:** One producer wanted a moult program. Others just wanted to continue in lay.

### Avian Metapneumovirus

**QUESTION:** have you seen active or acute Avian Metapneumovirus (aMPV) cases in Q4 (Oct-Dec 2024) in your practice?

**ANSWER 1 (pathologist):** At UCVM DSU we have seen ~ 13 cases with serologic reactivity. We don't currently have PCR in-house to confirm.

**ANSWER 2 (Veterinary practitioner):** We have seen one commercial layer flock. It wasn't peaking well. We've started attaching aMPV serology to our workup for this kind of case so we ran serology. We're adding aMPV serology to surveillance submissions as well.

In talking with eastern colleagues, we are hearing that others as well as us are finding lower titres in conjunction with a variety of less acute clinical problems. Currently there's uncertainty regarding how to interpret the titres in these situations, and it's possible that we've been over-interpreting them.



### Scan

February 25th 2025, the USDA announced enhanced funding to prevent the need for de-population of H5N1-infected flocks in the U.S., stressing biosecurity and supporting vaccine research. [LINK](#)

In Canada, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) published guidance for federal and provincial authorities for the future potential use of H5N1 vaccines in humans. This includes definitions for people at different risk of exposure and illness, and a decision matrix for when each group might consider H5N1 vaccinations. It's noteworthy that for the first (presumably lowest risk) scenario defined, i.e. no or very few human cases, poultry cases, and no dairy cases, i.e. current situation in Canada, the guidelines suggest vaccination of people working with known infected poultry could be considered.

For more information: [LINK](#)

### Meeting Takeaways

- Producers considering adding hay to scratch areas for enrichment need to ensure that it is shredded to prevent the chance of impactions or blockages in the birds.
- Avian metapneumovirus is being diagnosed in a variety of situations in western Canada. It has been diagnosed unexpectedly when doing blood testing for vaccine surveillance, and low levels of antibodies have been found in flocks with ongoing disease or production problems. Ongoing regular involvement with a vet is the best way to monitor and understand the disease challenges facing you and your flock.

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