



The WeCAHN Smallholder Network held a quarterly videoconference meeting on March 12th, 2026, to discuss animal health events occurring from October to December 2025 with veterinary practitioners, diagnosticians, veterinary college faculty, researchers, and industry representatives.

1) 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 Diagnostic Services Laboratory (VDS), Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS), and University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU).
3. Scan: smallholder surveillance reported by other sources or networks.

2) Interesting Cases

Presentation on lead poisoning by Dr. Erickson at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine Disease Investigation Unit

- Occurs during pasture season, often when cattle find discarded lead batteries.
- Young calves are most often affected because they are more likely to lick and chew unfamiliar objects, and they can reach into small spaces that adult cattle can't.
- Common signs include loss of coordination, blindness, seizures, and sudden death.
- In one small herd, most calves tested positive and many died, while the adult cattle remained unaffected.
- Rules for testing differ by province, and repeated testing is needed because lead leaves the body slowly.

Summary of blood testing requirements after lead poisoning is confirmed in a herd. Manitoba, Alberta and BC use a blood lead concentration of 0.1 ppm as the cutoff for releasing animals from movement restrictions.

Province	Provincially reportable	Follow-up testing	Prov. Gov. supported costs (tests & vet time)
British Columbia	Yes	Mandatory	Yes
Alberta	Yes	Mandatory	Yes
Saskatchewan	No	Under development	No
Manitoba	No	Voluntary	Yes



Case study: A small flock was diagnosed with infectious coryza and infectious bronchitis. A similar multi-province outbreak in 2024 was linked to birds from a shared supplier.

- Birds showed severe swelling of the head and eyes, and nasal discharge.
- The disease spread quickly and caused a noticeable drop in egg production.
- Bird shortages led producers to source from multiple suppliers, increasing disease risk.
- Recovered birds can remain carriers, so sourcing healthy stock and limiting mixing of birds is important.

Case study: Cancer in a small flock hen

- A backyard hen showed weight loss and difficulty eating due to growths in the mouth.
- Testing ruled out infectious causes such as trichomonosis (canker) or candida (thrush).
- The final diagnosis was a rare cancer affecting the tongue and nearby tissues. This cancer is rare in poultry but seen more often in pet birds.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI):

- No HPAI has been detected in Canadian dairy cattle, and all tested milk samples were negative ([LINK](#)).
- In poultry, recent HPAI detections in 26 farms occurred between December and March 2026 ([LINK](#)).



3) Syndromic Surveillance

Important information

Clinical impression surveys

Quarterly surveys are completed by network practitioners. Answers:

Never

Rarely = 1-2 times per 3 months

Commonly = 1-2 times per month

Very frequently = 3+ times per month



'Control charts'

Control charts are a simple way of presenting data collected over time (e.g., increasing or decreasing detection frequencies). Each data point reflects the number of positive samples or cases reported by a diagnostic laboratory over 3 months (quarter of a year). The upper and lower horizontal lines are called control limits. Individual points lying outside the control limits suggest a need for investigation to determine whether/how significant a signal they represent.



Small poultry flocks: Clinical impression survey and laboratory diagnostic results

Clinical impression survey

- Early mortality, behaviour issues, lameness, and predators were reported **Never** to **Rarely** and remained **stable**.
- Inclusion body hepatitis and related production issues were reported **Never** and were **stable** to **increasing**.
- Many diseases, including coccidiosis, *Salmonella*, and yolk sac infections, were reported never and remained **stable**.
- Infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT) and Marek's disease were reported **Rarely** to **Commonly** and were **stable** to **decreasing**.
- *Mycoplasma* was reported **Never** to **Commonly**.
- Infectious coryza was reported by one practitioner.

Laboratory Diagnostic Results

At **Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS)**, a duck was diagnosed with avian influenza (H5).

At the **University of Calgary Veterinary Medicine Diagnostic Services Unit (UCVM DSU)**, a backyard chicken was diagnosed with ILT.

At **Veterinary Diagnostic Services (VDS)**, one case of Marek's disease was reported.

Small flocks of small ruminants: Clinical impressions survey and laboratory results

Clinical impressions survey

- Weight loss conditions were reported **Rarely** and were **decreasing**.
- Mastitis was reported **Rarely** and remained **stable**.
- External parasites and related conditions were reported **Never** and were **stable**.
- Many diseases, including diarrhea, pneumonia, Johne's disease, coccidia, worms, lameness, and pregnancy issues, were reported **Rarely** to **Never** and were **decreasing**.

Laboratory results

At **UCVM DSU**, a goat was diagnosed with bacterial enteritis, yersiniosis, abscesses and swollen lymph nodes. A sheep was diagnosed with silica urolithiasis.



Small herds of swine: Clinical impressions survey and laboratory results

No CIS were received this quarter. No submissions were reported for laboratory diagnosis during this period.



4) Scan and other updates

- In BC, the most common diseases in small poultry flocks were yolk peritonitis and Marek's disease, based on submissions to the [Disease Detection Program for Smallholders](#).
- Manitoba is expanding outreach to small producers through a new quarterly newsletter, monthly webinars, and hands-on workshops, and is working to centralize online resources for easier access across species.
- Control of *Cysticercus ovis* in sheep is managed with dog deworming. AB lamb has available resources for producers, including a [factsheet](#) and a comprehensive Sheep and Goat Management in Alberta ([Health module](#)). *Taenia ovis* control in dogs prevents sheep condemnations due to *C. ovis* at the slaughter plant.
- In small ruminants, a practitioner reported an unusual outbreak of septicemic pasteurellosis that caused illness and deaths in pasture lambs.
- Mineral deficiencies, especially copper, were identified as an important risk factor for disease across small ruminant flocks.
- Reminder not to feed food waste to pigs due to African swine fever risk ([inspection.canada.ca](#)).
- Two cases of theileriosis were reported in Ontario cattle ([LINK](#)), linked to animal movement and insect spread, although the tick that carries the disease is not established in Canada. [CAHSS recorded webinar](#)
- In the United States, no new avian influenza cases were reported in dairy cattle during early 2026 ([LINK](#)). Poultry HPAI outbreaks continue in the U.S., affecting both commercial and small flocks ([LINK](#)).
- In Europe, avian influenza antibodies were detected for the first time in cow milk on a farm in the Netherlands. Cows were tested after the farm's cats became ill and died ([LINK](#)). Vaccination trials in turkeys in England ([gov.uk](#)).
- Sheep and goat pox are spreading across several European countries, with high levels in Greece ([LINK](#)).
- Lumpy skin disease remains a concern in Europe, with ongoing monitoring and outbreak assessments ([DEFRA](#)).

- Newcastle disease continues to spread in Europe, with cases in Poland, Germany, and Spain ([WATTPoultry](#)). Outbreaks are occurring even in vaccinated flocks, raising concerns about control measures.
- Foot and mouth disease was detected in Greece in March 2026, affecting cattle and sheep ([WAHIS](#)), with control measures including culling and movement restrictions in a 5 km zone.
- African swine fever continues to spread in wild boar across Europe ([DEFRA](#)).
- Biosecurity resources for smallholders are available at [animalhealthcanada.ca](#).



Producer takeaways

1. Lead toxicosis remains a consistent and preventable issue in grazing cattle, with young calves at highest risk. Regulatory requirements and testing vary across the provinces: reportable in BC and AB, voluntary follow-up testing in MB, and a plan is under development in SK.
2. Sourcing birds from multiple or uncertain suppliers increases the risk of introducing infectious diseases, making strong biosecurity and supplier selection essential. Many poultry infections look the same, so consult your veterinarian to diagnose the disease and develop a management and treatment plan.
3. Feeding pigs food waste or table scraps increases the risk of serious diseases like African swine fever and should be avoided. It is especially relevant where emerging and foreign animal diseases continue to evolve globally.

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