Poultry Health Basics: Infectious Laryngotracheitis (ILT)

What is ILT?

- Infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT) is a highly contagious respiratory disease that mainly causes illness in chickens, peafowl and pheasants. Waterfowl, other animals and humans are not affected.
- Generally, birds that have been exposed to ILT or vaccinated for ILT are considered to be contagious for the rest of their lives.
- Birds can appear healthy and still have the disease. If the “healthy” bird becomes stressed, it can then spread the disease to other healthy birds.

How does ILT spread?

- ILT is commonly spread when a bird that has been exposed to ILT or vaccinated for ILT is brought into a flock.
- Like any disease, ILT can be spread on equipment (cages, vehicles, waterers, etc.) or on people’s boots, hands and clothes.

Does ILT affect humans?

- No, ILT does not affect humans and in addition, it is not a food safety concern.

Why shouldn't I exhibit my birds who were exposed to ILT?

- Because exposed birds can appear healthy, still carry the disease and spread the disease to other birds.

What symptoms should I look for?

Symptoms of ILT usually occur in chickens 6-14 days after exposure and can include the following:

- difficulty breathing
- coughing
- sneezing
- watery or crusty eyes
- yellow or bloody mucus coming from nose or throat

These symptoms can range from severe to mild and may cause death.

If I see these symptoms, what should I do?

- If your birds have these symptoms, contact your veterinarian and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at (800) 292-3939 or (517) 373-0440 for after hours emergencies.

Reminder: practicing good biosecurity is crucial on farms of all types. While the practices may be implemented differently from farm to farm, there are always the same key components:

- **Keep your distance:** When new animals are added to a farm or after animals come home from an event, they should be separated up to 28 days from other animals to ensure they are healthy before introducing them.
- **Keep it clean:** Wash your hands, clothes and footwear thoroughly before and after working with animals. Regularly clean and disinfect your equipment.
- **Don't bring in disease:** Avoid sharing equipment or supplies with your neighbors. If you do, always clean and disinfect it before and after. Clean and disinfect your shoes, boots, vehicle and other items after leaving another farm, fair, exhibition or livestock market.
- **Recognize a sick animal:** Early detection of unhealthy animals helps prevent the spread of the disease. It is always wise to consult with your local, licensed veterinarian.

Michigan Department of AGRICULTURE & Rural Development