Poultry Health Basics: Infectious Laryngotracheitis (ILT)

For poultry superintendents and fair managers

By law, fairs and exhibitions are responsible for notifying exhibitors if poultry vaccinated against infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT) are allowed into the fair or exhibition. Birds known to be vaccinated for ILT cannot be legally imported into Michigan.

What is ILT?

- ILT is a highly contagious respiratory disease that causes illness in chickens, peafowl, and pheasants. Waterfowl, other animals, and humans are not affected.
- Birds that have been exposed to ILT through direct contact with an infected bird or a bird that has been vaccinated with an ILT vaccine that spreads ILT are considered to be contagious for the rest of their lives.
- Exposed birds can appear healthy and still have the disease. If the “healthy” bird becomes stressed, it can spread the disease to other healthy birds.
- When ILT occurs at a fair, all of the birds are impacted, even if they appear healthy. ILT is a serious disease that will result in actions to prevent further spread.

Most ILT-vaccinated exhibition birds are vaccinated with the type of vaccine that results in the bird becoming a carrier of ILT for life, which poses a danger to other birds. Frequently, exhibitors do not know they are using a vaccine that creates additional risks. Unless birds were vaccinated with the Vectormune or Innovax vaccines mentioned below, it is recommended that any birds vaccinated against ILT with a different vaccine or exposed to ILT-vaccinated birds where the vaccine used is unknown should not be allowed to exhibit.

What do I do if my fair allows birds vaccinated against ILT and an exhibitor says his bird is vaccinated against ILT?

- Ask to see proof of vaccination.
  - If they cannot provide proof - they should not exhibit the bird.
  - If they do provide proof, check that the vaccine was either Vectormune®FP (LT or LT+AE or HVT LT) or Innovax LT. These are the only vaccines that don't cause birds to become "exposed."
- Any vaccine for ILT that was given by placing the vaccine droplet in the eye is not safe as it will cause the bird to be "exposed" to ILT.
- If you are unsure that a vaccine was acceptable to use, contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at 800-292-3939 or 517-373-0440 for after-hours emergencies.

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.

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.

Michigan Department of AGRICULTURE & Rural Development