

What is infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT)?

ILT is a viral respiratory disease of poultry, fowl and other birds. Clinical signs range from mild disease including discharge from the eyes and nose, sneezing and a drop in egg production to more severe signs including coughing up blood, bloody discharge from the nose and mouth, gasping for air, and death. It takes anywhere from 6 to 14 days from when the bird becomes infected to when it shows clinical signs allowing for asymptomatic spread during this time. Five to 100% of the flock may become sick and 0 to 20% of the flock may die.



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What causes ILT?

ILT is caused by a herpes virus which causes a lifelong infection in the bird. Herpes viruses have the ability to hide from the infected bird's immune system until times of stress when the virus "awakens" and causes disease. Stressful events which can cause this reactivation include; mixing of new birds, sudden weather changes, transportation, vaccination for other diseases and illness. The ILT virus can survive outside of the bird too, including 3 months on wood surfaces protected from light, 3 weeks in buried carcasses, 3 days in droppings, 4 days in wet litter and 20 days in dry litter.

How does ILT spread?

ILT is most commonly spread to susceptible birds through direct contact with infected birds. The virus can be spread between barns and farms via inanimate objects however, such as contaminated equipment, vehicles, clothing and footwear. Winds can also carry the virus downwind of infected barns and manure. Enhanced biosecurity is therefore critical to prevent spread.



Blood and exudate in the trachea of a bird with ILT (photo credit: Dr. M Petrik)

How is ILT diagnosed?

Your veterinarian may submit sick or dead birds for post-mortem and tissue examinations. Findings consistent with ILT will be confirmed with testing for viral DNA using PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing. To be considered a case of ILT, 2 of the following 3 criteria must be met; clinical signs consistent with ILT, evidence of the virus on tissue examination (viral inclusion bodies), PCR positive test.

How is ILT treated and managed?

There is no treatment for ILT, however your veterinarian may prescribe antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections. Key management practices for controlling the spread of ILT within and between flocks include:

Vaccination

- If your previous flock was infected or if you are in close proximity to an infected premises, it is recommended that broiler chicks be vaccinated for ILT for two successive crops.
- If you are a producer in the FBCC biosecurity advisory area, discuss with your veterinarian about vaccinating your flock for ILT

Manure management

- Heat-treat litter at 38° C (100° F) for 100 hours prior to thorough cleanout and disinfection.
- When possible, wait for 8 weeks before manure is moved off the premises. On-site manure must be covered to reduce spread. If manure must be moved, ensure the manure hauler is aware of ILT on your farm and they employ appropriate biosecurity practices including securely covering manure in transit.