

# Dr Henk De Weerd

## Answers Questions on ParamyxoVirus Type 1

### **When did you first notice the symptoms of PPMV in pigeons?**

The first symptoms of PPMV we saw in 1983. Trembling heads, twisting necks and picking next to the feed. As long as the pigeons were able to still eat and drink the condition of the pigeon stayed remarkably good. Some six months later, much later in the summer/autumn, the symptoms were dramatically different. In general Young birds were drinking in excess, loads of water and producing watery droppings, a scraper was no longer required and a mop would be better to clean the wet floor.

### **What are the clinical symptoms of PPMV in pigeons today?**

After the initial stage of drinking lots of water and the severe wet droppings, again the central nervous symptoms as described before, but often later, neck twisting and trembling head would develop. But also we see bad green slimy droppings and also sudden death without any symptoms of illness before. All these cases were due to a lack of immunity because the pigeons were not vaccinated on weaning if at all.

### **As a pigeon fancier are there any further symptoms to look for?**

I will mention other symptoms of PPMV that are not known to most of you. I am pretty sure they occur depending on the localisation of the viral infection in the central nervous system of the individual pigeon concerned, such as behaviour disturbances like walking in circles in one direction ie anti-clockwise or clockwise, laying on their backs, wobbling when sitting on perches or on the floor, staring without any expression in to space and therefore not being able to find the feeder or drinker. Further symptoms also include, hanging of the upper eyelids - mostly in young birds; and also young pigeons pushing their shoulders forward. The virus is probably in these cases located in the lower brain in the direction of the spine. From time to time we also see a paralysed wing. I mean a wing that is hanging out without any tension. Same can be seen in one leg, hanging off without any tension. Most likely the viral infection is located lower in the spinal marrow.



### **Can you treat pigeons with PPMV?**

We vaccinate the pigeons again and again in all these cases (PPMV) sometimes 3-4 times within a few weeks. Sometimes pigeons recover remarkably fast after 1 or 2 extra vaccinations. And this is not an exception. So yes vaccinating infected pigeons is in my opinion a MUST. Several times a year we also see PPMV in nest youngsters, 3-25 days old. When this happens, we need to do an emergency vaccination with the La Sota drop method, which means all of the youngsters get 4 drops of the weakened live virus in the eyes and nostrils (4 drops per pigeons). A supporting treatment with antibiotics and electrolytes can be very helpful.

### **How do I vaccinate my pigeons?**

As far as I am concerned there can be no misunderstanding: This is very important.

1. Hold the needle oblique backwards, in the skin fold that appears when you pull up some feathers low in the neck in the median line.
2. Always vaccinate pigeons with an empty crop, this is very important. Many pigeons are mistakenly injected when there is a lot of grain inside, with all consequences. Because the full crop pushes against the subcutis (tissue under the skin) so more or less close to the place where we want to get our vaccine.

### **When is the best time to Vaccinate?**

Vaccinate preferably at the age from 4-5 weeks to obtain a good protection (immunity) as soon as possible. The virus has changed a little over the years (changing symptoms), some years it seems to be more aggressive. For that reason many tend to vaccinate their young birds twice (booster effect) with 4-6 weeks of the first dose. I recommend this.

### **Which Vaccine should I use?**

Few vaccines are registered in all European countries and of course we

need to use the ones that are registered in your own country, unless the producer does not have stock, which happens regularly with Colombovac (brand) vaccines.

Personally I prefer to vaccinate with water based vaccines.

With the so called white oil adjuvans vaccines, we regularly see vaccination reactions like granulomas (knots) in the neck and loss of condition in the pigeon. At the same time our injection pistols are leaking due to the reaction of the rubber in the syringe with the oil from the white vaccines: in 1983 I published an article about this problem. Granuloma forming has nothing to do with sterility at the injection site, nor with the temperature of the vaccine etc. It is just an unpredictable coincidence with nasty consequences.

N.B. In case of self-injection you could get severe problems in the injection site.

### **Do other Viruses affect the efficacy of PPMV Vaccine?**

It is often discussed and written that circovirus has something to do with the assumed less good efficacy of the first vaccination in young birds.

However, I do not believe this at all. The circovirus exists in pigeons for many decades, this is nothing new. It does not make me nervous at all and has little to do with changing pigeon diseases over the last 30 years. The so called "adenocoli syndrome" has even become more mild than before and can successfully be treated, with the right antibiotics.

### **Should I vaccinate my old birds and stock?**

Old pigeons need to be vaccinated once a year, including the breeders. This can be done until a few weeks before pairing. Also when they are on eggs, or with youngsters in the nest. Even shortly before the racing season starts (2-3 weeks before).

### **If I suspect PPMV an outbreak of PPMV what advice would you give?**

In all cases of an outbreak of PPMV the device is: immediately vaccinate all pigeons, also the sick ones!!! Thus we can save a lot of birds!

### **Why is it that sometimes after vaccinating the symptoms of the disease are present?**

It is very remarkable that if we vaccinate pigeons in this incubation period, then the disease (symptoms) will come out. However, when we vaccinate the pigeons immediately once the symptoms are shown, the vaccination will often work as a therapy (treatment) and many pigeons will survive. Extra problem is that the incubation period can be up to 6 weeks.

### **How has the disease changed in recent year ?**

The last few years we see more cases of sudden death as a result of PPMV infections in especially young birds but also in old pigeons. Especially when the infection pressure is high and the immunity level is very low. And always take the long incubation time into account which makes outbreaks sometimes unpredictable and incomprehensible, unless you know the situation.

### **If I bring pigeons in to my loft from another loft or abroad what is your advise?**

Vaccinate your pigeons as soon as possible after weaning. All new pigeons should be Vaccinate immediately before entering your loft even if the loft they come from states they are vaccinated. Better to be safe than sorry. Keep separate for at least two weeks.

For further advise please call Henk on 01206 842221

### **Dr H J M de Weerd MRCVS**

Veterinary surgeon for racing pigeons  
UK Belgica Clinic  
Unit G5, The Seedbed Centre  
Wyncolls Rd, Colchester, Essex. CO4 9HT