VIRULENT NEWCASTLE DISEASE (vND) Q&A

What is Virulent Newcastle Disease?

Virulent Newcastle Disease (vND) is a disease of wild and domestic birds that causes extremely high mortality (death rate). **Virulent Newcastle Disease is a serious disease of birds, but it is not a food safety concern.**[1]

In birds, the disease causes respiratory symptoms (sneezing, gasping, nasal discharge, coughing), diarrhea, depression, neurologic signs, swelling of the eyes and neck, and sudden death. Death is often the first indication of a vND outbreak.[2]

How is vND spread?

Virulent Newcastle Disease is spread when healthy birds come in contact with secretions/excretions of infected birds. The virus can also be spread via objects such as equipment, boots, or coveralls.[3]

Does vND exist in the United States?

Currently, only backyard birds (not for human consumption) have been infected with vND in the United States. According to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website, "Since May 18, 2018, USDA has confirmed 445 premises in California as infected with vND, including 141 in San Bernardino County, 259 in Riverside County, 44 in Los Angeles County, one in Ventura County, and one in Alameda County. USDA also confirmed one infected premises in Utah County, Utah and one infected premises in Coconino County, Arizona."[4] The backyard birds at issue are distinguished from the U.S. commercial poultry flock, which is intended for human consumption.

Why is vND such a concern to the U.S. poultry industry?

Virulent Newcastle Disease is not a food safety concern. However, the disease is deadly to birds, causing death in almost all infected birds.

Virulent Newcastle Disease is one of the most serious poultry diseases worldwide.[5] Because of high mortality, the World Organization for Animal Health considers vND as a "notifiable disease," therefore it is a trade-limiting foreign animal disease of poultry. Countries with confirmed cases of vND are subject to international trade restrictions, which help reduce the introduction of the disease to other countries via trade.[6] Currently, trade is still open for U.S. exports of poultry, as the disease has been contained to a few sites, and has only infected backyard birds, not the commercial flock.

Does vND pose a risk to humans?

Virulent Newcastle Disease is a serious disease of birds, but it is not a food safety concern.[7] In very rare cases, people working directly with sick birds have contracted the disease and showed mild symptoms like conjunctivitis (redness of the eyes).[8]

Helpful Links:

United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/virulent-newcastle/vnd

World Organization for Animal Health (OIE): http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=chapitre_nd.htm

References:

[1,2,4,5,6,8] United Stated Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS): Virulent Newcastle Disease. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/virulent-newcastle/vnd. Accessed May 28, 2019.

[3] USDA APHIS vND Factsheet. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-vnd.pdf. Accessed June 18, 2019.

[6] World Organization for Animal Health (OIE): OIE-listed diseases, infections, and infestations in force in 2019. http://www.oie.int/animal-health-in-the-world/oie-listed-diseases-2019/. Accessed June 18, 2019.

[7] United Stated Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS): Virulent Newcastle Disease. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/virulent-newcastle/vnd. Accessed May 28, 2019.