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Introduction

Staphylococcal infections are relatively common in poultry and are usually caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*. Infections are found in joints, bones, tendons (especially of the lower leg) as well as in the skin, bursae, yolk sac, heart sac, liver and lungs. A staphylococcal septicaemia is frequently seen in layers and broilers where it causes sudden deaths.

In turkeys, *Staphylococcus aureus* is often isolated from birds condemned for 'green liver-osteomyelitis complex'.

MRSAs (Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*) are of increasing interest in the human health field but the role of poultry in this problem is probably insignificant.

Epidemiology

This organism is found wherever poultry are reared. Staphylococci are widespread in nature and commonly found on the skin, in hatcheries, on farms and in processing plants. Some strains, but not all, of *Staphylococcus aureus* have the ability to cause disease in poultry following their entry through the skin following damage, for example, from beak trimming or vaccination by injection or mucous membranes or the open navel of young chicks.

If birds are immunosuppressed, for example by chicken anaemia agent, fatal septicaemias and/or gangrenous dermatitis can occur.

Clinical signs

The incubation period is short (2-3 days).

Early clinical signs include ruffled feathers, a reluctance to move and fever. These are followed by signs that reflect the part(s) of the bird's body where infection has become localised, such as swollen joints or sternal bursae.

Morbidity and mortality are usually low. Lameness from hock synovitis can result from birds not getting to feeders and becoming debilitated and dying.

Pathology

Gross lesions of osteomyelitis cause bones to become fragile and break and a good example of this is the condition known as femoral head necrosis. Arthritis and/or synovitis are commonly seen, for example in hock synovitis. Sometimes lesions are encountered in the spine.

In most soft tissue organs, such as liver, spleen and kidneys, lesions are characterised by congestion and tissue necrosis.

A mild gangrenous dermatitis of the wing tips (blue wing disease) is sometimes encountered.

Staphylococcal infections are often associated with foot abscesses (bumble foot) in older birds.

At processing staphylococcal infection is often associated with green livers or, occasionally, granulomata.

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