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Clinical signs

In chickens reovirus induced lameness is rarely seen before five weeks of age even though infection could have occurred through the egg or shortly following hatching.

In acute infections stunting may occur, but in chronic infections the lameness is more pronounced and, as this develops, bilaterally affected birds can become recumbent. Morbidity can be 100% but mortality is usually low.

Typically in broilers 5% of the flock show swelling over the gastrocnemius or digital flexor tendons and as the flock ages poor weight and FCR figures are seen. As well as mortality, affected birds will be condemned at processing. Often a high proportion of the flock sero-converts.

In older roaster birds or teenage or older broiler breeders rupture of the gastrocnemius tendon is sometimes seen.

In the last few years turkeys over three or four months of age have been affected by reovirus arthritis – these birds have swollen hocks and are lame.

Pathology

Typically gross lesions centre around swelling of the gastrocnemius, digital flexor and metatarsal extensor tendons. If the gastrocnemius tendon has ruptured, a greenish discolouration of the covering skin is seen.

The hock joint usually contains small volumes of blood tinged fluid/exudate and early on in the disease the tendon sheaths may be quite oedematous. This then progresses via inflammation into a hardening, and sometimes fusion, of the tendon sheaths. Small erosions are often seen on articular cartilages and these can enlarge, converge and involve the underlying bone.

Immunity

Avian reoviruses possess group specific antigens which induce antibodies that can be tested for. Typically these appear within two weeks of infection.

Diagnosis

An initial diagnosis can be made on clinical signs and post mortem findings but it should be remembered that *Mycoplasma synoviae*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and other bacteria can cause similar findings. Confirmation is by detection of the causative agent.

Vaccination

Vaccination programmes are designed to protect chicks as soon as they hatch and this is done by vaccinating chick source flocks. This is best done by vaccinating such flocks after 12 weeks of age with an inactivated vaccine.