

## **The virus: some answers to some common questions**

### **Are recovered Rota birds immune for life?**

The quick answer is almost certainly not. However no one knows for sure. What I can say is that it would be a pretty unusual virus if a single short term illness of just 5 to 7 days, as is the case with Rota, was sufficient stimulation to the immune system to provide a life time of immunity. With most viruses after a period of time a percentage of birds become vulnerable to reinfection and as time goes by this percentage steadily increases. PPMV for example is fairly typical. When we did the trials in 2012/2013 we found that 10% of birds could catch the disease again after 12 months and the number went up from there. This is why PPMV immunity needs boosting with annual vaccinations. Many viral diseases, not only PPMV, need either annual boosting or several vaccinations given over a period of time for protective immunity to form. For the same reason our pet dogs and cats have annual boosters. It would be unusual if Rota was significantly different. This is a new disease and although no one knows the true answer a trial similar to that for PPMV will give the answer. These trials are already being discussed in Melbourne. 13/2/17

<http://www.melbournebirdvet.com/pigeon-virus-update.aspx>

### **My loft does not have the disease but I have had a missing youngster return that I would like to keep. What should I do ?**

The incubation time ( ie the time from catching the virus until the bird gets sick ) is not known for Rota virus but evidence suggests that it is 5 to 7 days. I am not aware of any cases where it has been longer than 10 days. Fanciers should isolate the returned bird for at least 10 days and adopt strict quarantine. This means that no material from the bird, particularly droppings, should leave the quarantine area. The bird should not be handled or if this is necessary the hands should be disinfected before going to the loft. The bird should not come in contact with clothing. If the bird is still well after 10 days, although we cannot say for sure, it is probably safe to return the bird to the loft. 13/2/17 <http://www.melbournebirdvet.com/pigeon-virus-update.aspx>

### **My birds have caught the disease. What can I give them ?**

There is no direct treatment for Rota virus. The virus simply has to run its course. There is evidence however that commencing treatment with an antibiotic that is effective against the common bowel pathogens such as E. coli can reduce the mortality rate. We have identified some E. coli infections in some birds infected with Rota virus. The antibiotics in treating the E. coli are likely to be helping some birds fight the virus. All other treatment is supportive. That means that the basics of good pigeon care need to apply. The birds need to be kept clean, fed a nutritious diet etc. Basically just all the usual things a good fancier would do. I notice already that some are trying to capitalise on this disease and supply vitamins etc as boosters. It is way too early to say if any of these supplements are of any advantage but I would think that in a loft that is already being well managed, probably they are not. 25/1/17 <http://www.melbournebirdvet.com/pigeon-virus-update.aspx>

### **I live in WA. My loft was infected with Rota virus in mid-2016. I have bred some healthy looking babies this season. Could these babies spread the virus?**

All youngsters bred from surviving stock birds at the time of the outbreak will become infected with the virus and some will die in the nest or be weaned as weakened babies. However youngsters bred months after the outbreak, even within the carrier period or in a contaminated loft can be expected to be quite healthy. It is thought that this is because the level of immunity in surviving stock birds rises with time and these stock birds not only expose their babies to the virus but also pass their own immunity to the youngsters through the egg and crop milk. This means that these apparently healthy youngsters are in fact infected with the virus and even though they don't look sick themselves, can spread the virus into previously uninfected lofts. This is not only thought to happen with Rota virus but does happen with other common pigeon viral diseases such as Herpes virus. 13/2/17

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### **Risk of transfer of virus at pigeon club meetings.**

At the Kyabram sale where the first infected birds were recorded in Victoria, all of the fanciers who subsequently had the disease in their lofts either bought birds or handled birds. Fanciers who did not handle the birds did not get the disease in their lofts -- this despite the fact that there were infected birds in the room. The chance of virus transfer from one fancier to another is very remote however if fanciers were particularly concerned then washing the clothes worn to the meeting and not wearing the same shoes in the loft should eliminate any risk. 6/2/17

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