

POULTRY VET HEALTH GUIDE - COCCIDIA

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An introduction to Coccidia- A dangerous parasite

With the wealth of information available to the modern poultry keeper it can be overwhelming at times, especially with regards to parasites. Coccidia are one of the most significant parasites for the domestic poultry keeper, as they can cause a swift decline in condition, depression, wasting and even death. Once an infestation has established it can be difficult to control and your birds are at risk from secondary infections. This guide is aimed to help understand the complex issue of coccidiosis and control methods

Environmental Risks

Coccidia are found naturally in the environment and all adult poultry will have a population of coccidia in the gut, which is tolerated by the bird. Environment plays a large part in the risks associated with the disease.

1. **Deep litter** - birds that are housed on deep litter are more likely to suffer with infestations of the parasite, This can be made worse if the litter is damp as this environment is more favourable for reproduction of coccidia
2. **Young chickens** - are at HIGH risk especially if have recently been introduced to deep litter systems, onto poached ground or in contact with adults
3. **Poached ground** - areas of earth in runs that have a build up of coccidia eggs (Oocysts)

Coccidia

Coccidia are a small single celled parasite that colonise the gut. They are species specific with seven species found in chickens, five to turkeys, three to pheasants, one to quail and two to guinea fowl. Not all species cause the same disease severity and low coccidia burdens can be tolerated well by adults.

Spotting Coccidia

- Infection can show from 3-6 weeks of age
- Diarrhoea, this can be white or bloody depending on the species of coccidia present
- Birds can show lethargy, depression, a hunched appearance, or death depending on the severity of the infection
- Coccidia infections can be made worse if the bird is stressed, or immune-deficient.
- Other disease can cause a superinfection while the birds are in this diseased state

Treatment

All treatments given should be supported by good husbandry

1. **Empty house**, remove feeders, perches etc, clean and disinfect
2. **Consider vaccination** of chicks from a day old up to 9 days of age
3. **Ask your Vet** about medication to control outbreaks.

Important - Of the anticoccidial treatments available, most are only available in large quantities and none are currently licenced for laying poultry

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