



### Paramyxovirus infection in pigeons: Victoria situation report

**Date:** 15 December 2011 **Time:** 12:00 hrs

*Issued by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries for the pigeon and related industries.*

#### **Important – Ban of all pigeon gatherings in Victoria**

The Minister for Agriculture and Food Security has issued an Order prohibiting the holding of shows, exhibitions, markets, sales, auctions, tossing and racing pigeons anywhere in the State of Victoria. The ban should assist the containment of the disease and is made with the support of the Victorian pigeon industry.

Loft flying has been assessed as a low risk activity for racing birds and may continue. Where several lofts are within a small area, owners are encouraged to coordinate their loft flying to minimise the mixing of their birds. Tired or disorientated birds should be prevented from entering other lofts should they land there.

This ban will be in effect for up to **90 days, due to finish on 27 December 2011**. A copy of the Order is available on the DPI website.

#### **Situation Analysis**

- There are now 55 properties in Victoria where the virus has been confirmed in pigeons that are sick or have died, located around Shepparton and Melbourne suburbs. Of those, 33 have now been resolved.
- There have been no more confirmed case of Paramyxovirus 1 (PMV1) in feral pigeons. There have however been five more new suspect cases of PMV1 in feral pigeons across Melbourne. All of these suspect cases were within 5 kilometres of a previously confirmed positive PMV1 case in the feral pigeon population. To date, feral pigeons in twelve locations in Melbourne have tested positive to PMV1.
- The last confirmed case of PMV1 occurred on 14 December 2011.
- New reports of sickness and death in pigeons continue to be investigated by DPI. However, most activities are now associated with releasing infected properties from quarantine.
- Natural infection has not been detected in chickens.

#### **Background**

- Since late August 2011, a paramyxovirus not previously reported in Australia has been detected in hobby pigeons on a number of properties in Victoria causing high mortality associated with lethargy, gastrointestinal and neurological signs.
- The virus was confirmed as PMV1 by the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL).

#### **Actions taken in Victoria**

- The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is restricting pigeon movements by banning pigeon shows, exhibitions, markets, sales, auctions, tossing and racing. The ban has been introduced given the current disease situation and at the request of racing, show and fancy associations. Loft-flying is excluded, it poses a low risk as birds do not mix with other lofts to the extent apparently required to spread disease.
- The Incident Management Team was established at Attwood by the DPI and operated from there for two months until 11 November. Since then the response is being managed by DPI staff from their normal work locations. PMV-1 will remain a priority for DPI who

will continue with its primary objective of identifying the extent of the disease and limiting its spread where possible. DPI will continue to investigate reports of significant unexpected die offs in pigeons (racing, hobby or feral) or other birds. Reports of such events should be made to 1800 657 888.

- Investigations are ongoing by DPI to determine possible links between known infected properties and to detect other affected properties. Further movements of birds from these properties are being prevented by quarantine to limit the chances of further spread.
  - Movement of infected birds is the principal method by which the disease is spreading. Investigations to date suggest that other forms of spread, for example by feed, are not significant. Irresponsible movement of pigeons risks introducing the disease to new properties where it will kill the majority or all of the pigeons.
  - DPI has reviewed the evidence available regarding vaccination - there is no registered vaccine for pigeons in Victoria, nor any safety or efficacy data for the use of Newcastle Disease vaccine off-label by veterinarians. These and other issues are considered in information available on the DPI website. It is of paramount importance vaccinated pigeons are healthy and live within healthy flocks, that the vaccine is used in close consultation with a veterinarian, and that owners ensure high standards of biosecurity to limit the chance of introducing infection into their flocks.
  - DPI is supportive of the procedures in place to get an appropriate Australian Pesticides and Veterinary medicines APVMA permit, or registration, to enable the importation of a specific, killed PMV-1 vaccine.
  - An extensive media and communications effort has been undertaken to inform veterinarians, industry and the public about the incident, to increase awareness and provide information about what to look out for, who to contact and measures that can be undertaken to limit the risk to their birds. Information is being provided by media release, direct contact, the DPI website and email.
- **Suspected cases of paramyxovirus infection should be reported to the DPI by phoning 1800 675 888.**
  - **General information regarding the paramyxovirus can be obtained from the DPI website (from [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)) or phoning 136 186 during business hours.**

The next industry sitrep will be provided on Thursday 22 December 2011. Further sitreps will be released on a weekly basis or in response to a significant change.

**Dr Andrew Cameron**  
**Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Victoria**

**Attachments:**

Map of the current affected properties



