# Paramyxovirus infection in pigeons: Victoria situation report

**Date:** 30 September 2011 **Time:** 1800 hrs

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

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

The Minister for Agriculture and Food Security will issue 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 final 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. A copy of the Order will be available on the DPI website.

**Situation Analysis**

- Spread of infection is through the moving of hobby pigeons between properties and the mixing of pigeons at sales, races, shows and other events; to stop the spread of the disease, these activities must cease.
- There is no safety and efficacy data available for the vaccine in pigeons; vaccination is not the silver bullet - stopping the mixing of pigeons will be what contains this outbreak.
- There are now 35 infected properties in Victoria, where the virus has been confirmed in pigeons that are sick or have died.
- The last confirmed case of PMV1 occurred on 27 September. New reports of sickness and death in both racing pigeons and fancy pigeons received by DPI and are still being investigated.
- No poultry or wild birds have tested positive to paramyxovirus.

**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.
- Affected pigeon flocks have experienced high mortalities, associated with lethargy, gastrointestinal and neurological signs.
- The virus was confirmed as avian paramyxovirus type 1 by the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL).

**Actions taken in Victoria**

- The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) will restrict pigeon movement by banning pigeon events such as shows, exhibitions, markets, sales, auctions and racing (including tossing).
- The ban is being introduced given the current disease situation and at the request of racing, show and fancy associations.
- Loft-flying will be excluded and poses a low risk as birds do not mix with other lofts to the extent apparently required to spread disease.

State Government Victoria

- The Incident Management Team (IMT) established at Attwood by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has been operating now for 25 days and continues with its primary objective of identifying the extent of the disease and limiting its spread where possible.
- Confirmed cases are located in Shepparton/Tatura area and outer suburbs of Melbourne, extending to the south west as far as Hoppers crossing, to the south east as far as Cranbourne and to the north as far as Epping.
- Investigations are being ongoing by DPI to determine possible links between known infected properties and to detect other affected properties.
- Reports of sick or dead birds from industry, veterinarians and the public are also being investigated by DPI.
- Movements of birds to and from known infected properties are being investigated to determine possible sources of infection and the extent of disease spread. 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 use in pigeons in Victoria, nor is there 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 that should veterinary advice dictate that pigeons be vaccinated that they are healthy and live within healthy flocks, that the vaccine is used in close consultation with a veterinarian, and that pigeon owners ensure high standards of biosecurity to limit the chance of introduction of infection into their flocks. Remember, flocks not introducing pigeons nor allowing contact with other pigeons would have no need for vaccination.
- 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 136 186 during business hours or 1800 675 888 after hours and on weekends.**

The next industry sitrep will be provided on Tuesday 4 October 2011. Futher information on Paramyxovirus infection in pigeons can be obtained from www.dpi.vic.gov.au

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

Attachments:
Map of the current affected properties
DPI media release about the ban