

Letters

SURVEILLANCE

Testing for exclusion of notifiable avian disease

DEFRA, the AHVLA and the devolved administrations have been discussing with poultry industry organisations access to testing for the exclusion of notifiable avian disease (NAD) in circumstances that would not require the implementation of statutory disease control measures, such as premises movement restrictions.

Currently, a private veterinary surgeon (PVS) may ask for an AHVLA veterinarian to attend a consultation case where a NAD (avian influenza or Newcastle disease) is very low on the differential diagnosis list but cannot be excluded entirely. The AHVLA

vet would then either rule out the suspicion of notifiable disease on clinical grounds or, if a notifiable disease is suspected, impose premises movement restrictions and begin an official investigation, including sampling.

Poultry owners/keepers and their veterinarians will shortly have access to a new service, available at the National Reference Laboratory at AHVLA – Weybridge, that enables testing to exclude the involvement of a NAD. This service is specifically intended for use in cases where NAD is not formally suspected, but cannot be excluded from the differential diagnosis of a flock health or production problem.

This service may help to detect NAD at the earliest opportunity in those cases where the clinical signs do not give rise to a level of suspicion of a NAD that justifies either a consultation case or a statutory notification and official inquiry in the first instance.

This service will allow a PVS to submit samples to the AHVLA where, after a telephone discussion with the AHVLA duty vet, it is agreed that notifiable disease is not suspected. The AHVLA will charge the full cost for testing. Testing for NAD will be by validated, internationally recognised PCR methods, using swabs from the oropharynx and cloaca. For samples received on weekdays, results will usually be available within 48 hours after receipt of the samples at AHVLA – Weybridge. Arrangements for submissions and/or testing out-of-hours will also be available. Negative results will be sent direct to the submitting PVS. Non-negative results will trigger an official NAD investigation by the AHVLA. Initially, the service will only allow submissions from chicken and turkey flocks in Great Britain although, if successful, it may be extended to other species at a later date.

No official disease control restrictions will usually be applied, although the farmer should consider, with their PVS, any voluntary restrictions that may be appropriate. Legislation does allow official restrictions to be applied under this derogation for NAD testing. However, it is unlikely this will be invoked in such NAD cases because the need to implement official measures would usually indicate a level of suspicion of notifiable disease that requires a statutory veterinary investigation to be performed.

This new AHVLA service will be initially piloted for one year, starting on May 23, 2014, in Great Britain. More information is available from www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/disease-control/nad

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