

Pigeon Fever

No longer
only in dry,
Western states



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Health through Diagnostics

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Most known information on *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*, or pigeon fever, does not reflect current disease trends. In recent years, the disease that was once considered endemic in California and dry, arid climates in the West has spread as far north as Washington state and has been reported in such eastern states as Kentucky and Florida.

Cases in California, Texas and Oklahoma still top the charts in numbers, but pigeon fever is spreading to areas unfamiliar with the disease.

"Many horse owners, like myself, would like to see a licensed vaccine, and there is evidence with increasing cases in some states that would support the need for a vaccine," says Amy Swinford, DMV, MS, Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL) associate director.

Though named for the oft-seen chest abscesses, reminiscent of a pigeon, swelling and abscesses can develop all over the body. However, as pigeon fever is transmitted through contact with contaminated soil or through fly bites, the chest, midline and groin areas are often common abscess sites.

About TVMDL:

The Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory protects animal and human health through diagnostics.

An agency of the Texas A&M University System, TVMDL comprises two full-service laboratories, in College Station and Amarillo, and two poultry laboratories, in Center and Gonzales.

TVMDL is among 12 core laboratories in the National Animal Health Laboratory Network, a group of state and regional laboratories designed to provide a nationwide surge testing, response, and recovery capacity in the event of an animal disease outbreak.

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According to Dr. Swinford, in Texas alone there was a 1,650-percent jump in confirmed pigeon fever cases between 2005 and 2011. That is an average annual increase of 177-percent.

Veterinarians in all states should be familiar with the clinical signs of this disease:

- External abscesses, often accompanied by swelling.
- Internal abscesses and ulcerative lymphangitis are the two other forms of the disease that, while less common, can be much more serious.
- Fever
- Lethargy and/or depression
- Weight loss
- Edema
- Lameness

If pigeon fever is suspect, TVMDL can conduct a bacterial culture on material collected from external abscesses.

TEST: Culture, Aerobic & Anaerobic - Companion/Equine

PRICE: \$23.00 per animal with a \$6.00 accession fee.

SAMPLE: Abscess aspirate/pus

TURNAROUND: Run Monday-Saturday with results within 24-72 hours.

If internal abscesses are suspected and there is no obvious sample for culture, a serology test may be useful to identify this form of the infection.

TEST: Caseous lymphadenitis (pigeon fever) screen (SHI)

PRICE: \$8.00 per animal, with a \$6.00 accession fee.

SAMPLE: 1 cc serum (*NOTE: specimens will be titered unless "screen only" is specified.*)

TURNAROUND: Run Monday-Thursday with results in a minimum of one business day if received by 1:00 pm.

TEST: Caseous lymphadenitis (pigeon fever) titer (SHI)

PRICE: \$10.00 per animal, with a \$6.00 accession fee.

SAMPLE: 1 cc serum

TURNAROUND: Run Monday-Thursday with results in a minimum of two business days if received by 1:00 pm.

Veterinarians may submit a sample following these guidelines:

- Culture: Typical specimen is a culturette or sterile tube containing pus or abscess fluid.
- Caseous lymphadenitis (pigeon fever)/(SHI) serology: 1 cc or more of serum in a sterile tube.
- Submit with ice packs for specimen validity.
- Ship for overnight delivery to the lab as soon as possible.
- Include horse's complete clinical history.
- Note suspicion of pigeon fever in the history.

The use of antibiotics can potentially hinder the ability to isolate the organism.

Visit tvmdl.tamu.edu for more information.