



Game Bird & Poultry Health Fact Sheet

Hexamita – Hexi

What is it?

Spironucleosis, better known by its old name of Hexamita or Hexi, is a small organism known as a protozoa. Hexamita is commonly found in gamebirds during the rearing and release phase. On post mortem, it is commonly found in the small intestine or caecum and can be found alongside such diseases as coccidia or trichomonas which can cause enteritis.

The parasite is excreted in the faeces of infected birds and then ingested by other birds, causing infection in them also. The parasites live in the guts and feed off the glucose in the intestines. This effectively starves the birds and results in the common clinical signs seen for the disease.

Stressful periods including overcrowding and bad weather can exacerbate the disease.

Symptoms / Clinical Signs

- Frothy yellow faeces
- Thin birds with a 'razor sharp keel bone'
- Birds tend to be dull and lethargic, often the birds are reluctant to move even when disturbed
- Hunched up birds, often try to hide
- Dehydration
- Death
- Some people have reported that birds 'stand on their toes' or scratch out food

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is confirmed by a vet at post mortem. Live birds should be submitted for post mortem as Hexamita are sensitive to changes in temperature so die very quickly when the bird does.

Treatment

There is no specific licensed treatment, however your vet will recommend a combination of antibiotics alongside rehydration therapy. Severely affected birds should be culled as they are sources of infection to others.

Quill Productions Veterinary Services

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Prevention

Prevention and supporting your bird's health is the best way to deal with and prevent outbreaks of Hexamita. Hexamita is commonly associated with wet periods of weather and stress, so it is important to consider your pen design and pen locations if you are repeatedly having outbreaks of Hexamita.

- Hygiene in and around the drinkers and feeders is very important. Frequently moving drinkers (if possible) and feeders is beneficial as when birds eat and drink they defecate around them, thus potentially excreting infections. Other birds often peck the ground as part of their natural behaviour and if doing so in concentrated areas of faeces are more likely to become infected
- The use of Quill Ultra Dri Powder can benefit the hygiene in and around wet areas making it less likely for parasites to survive
- Filling in puddles or restricting access to dirty water is essential to preventing your birds picking up Hexamita
- Providing birds with nipple drinkers, raising their feed off the ground and providing anti-scratch rings can greatly reduce the possibility of your birds ingesting infected water or feed
- Improving the gut health of your birds helps to reduce the possibility of infections by allowing the birds to better cope with a challenge, and also help the birds recover post infection;
 - Water quality is an essential part of promoting gut health within the birds. Hexamita causes extensive damage to the gut and so ensuring the health is as good as it possibly can be will help the bird to cope with and recover from a challenge. The use of water sanitisers such as Hydrocare can aid in good gut health which can prevent infections taking hold
 - Providing products such as Quill Boost (organic acids and amino acid concentration) help to maximise gut health of birds as well as support the immune system. The provision of this as a routine supplement can help prevent infections. However if infections do occur, then it is extremely beneficial in restoring the gut health back to its optimum following treatment
- Reducing stress is very important. A lower stocking density helps to reduce the chance of new and repeat infections. Often diagnoses are made in areas where space allowance is not great enough. The quality of the release pen is very important, there needs to be ample cover for the birds in order to provide areas to hide from predators and weather. When releasing poults this should be done in a calm and patient manner i.e. placing the crates near cover and allowing the birds to exit on their own
- Supporting your birds with products such as Quill Lyte plus during periods of stress (such as period of handling) can help to maintain hydration and in turn support overall health
- Biosecurity is very important to aid in preventing the spread of the disease due to its contagious nature. Footbaths using DEFRA approved disinfectants such as FAM 30 should be placed outside of the pens to disinfect foot wear
- Cleaning and disinfection products such as Intra Foam, GPC8 or Multi Des for example are effective in cleaning areas to help reduce the spread of disease to your birds and between pens

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