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Precautions for Day Old Fowl Pox Vaccination

By P. SMETANA, B.Sc. (Agric.), Poultry Branch

DURING 1962 day old vaccination was widely adopted as a preventative measure against fowl pox. From June, 1961, until mid-June, 1962, this procedure proved to be highly successful, but from this date onwards a proportion of treated flocks became affected by breakdowns accompanied by mortality and retarded growth. In some cases the losses were disturbingly high.

At first, most breakdowns could be traced to faulty vaccination but later in the season there were some breakdowns which could not be explained on the basis of technique and management. Despite intensive investigations into nearly all cases of breakdowns reported to the Department of Agriculture, there were a few instances where losses caused by vaccination could not be attributed to a definite factor. For this reason the Department neither recommended nor condemned day old vaccination after breakdowns were experienced, but provided information on the subject and left it to the poultry farmer to decide, according to the circumstances, whether to vaccinate his birds at day old or to defer vaccination until they reached the age of 12 weeks.

The widespread use of day old vaccination in the industry last year indicates that this procedure has certain advantages as long as the risk of losses from breakdowns, either in the form of mortality or stunted growth, can be overcome.

At this stage there seems to be no guarantee that vaccination will be 100 per cent. successful, even though a large number of farmers experienced no extra losses.

In an attempt to identify the cause of breakdowns in those cases where it was not possible to detect a definite feature usually associated with losses, a special investigation into all reported instances of losses will be conducted by officers of the Department of Agriculture.

Poultry farmers can help by reporting experiences with day old fowl pox vaccination during the approaching chicken season. A special questionnaire has been prepared which seeks information concerning various features associated with vaccination and farmers are urged to supply this information as accurately as possible to poultry extension officers.

Information obtained in this way will be analysed for a possible pattern which could lead to recommendations for overcoming the risk of losses which seems to exist at present.

For the forthcoming chicken season, it appears that many farmers will revert to vaccination at 12 weeks of age while others who had successful results last year will continue to use day old vaccination. Experiences in the field together with special investigations and trials at the Poultry Research Station have resulted in the following list of precautions, and factors to be familiar with, before birds are vaccinated at day old against fowl pox. Special attention to all these items will help to reduce the risk of losses from vaccination.

PRECAUTIONS

(1) Healthy day old chickens only should be vaccinated. The presence of disease or poorly hatched chickens would preclude against day old vaccination.
The recommended time of vaccination is at day old, preferably before the chicks are placed under the brooder.

Cross bred chicks seem less susceptible to a reaction from vaccination than pure breds.

Vaccination must be carried out by a skilled operator.

Vaccination should be in the tissue connecting the thigh to the abdomen—never in the flesh.

A special single pronged needle should be used to ensure that correct levels of the vaccine are administered. The needles can be obtained with the vaccine on request.

Diluting the vaccine down to half strength has been tried but is not generally recommended. It appears to be effective but does not necessarily reduce the risk of a reaction.

Chicks should be handled correctly, with a minimum of added stress. Severe debeaking at day old added to the effects of vaccination may result in some reaction due to excessive stress.

Brooder temperatures should be correctly maintained, particularly during the first three weeks—the recommended temperatures are 95°F for the first three weeks, 85°F for the fourth week, 75°F for the fifth week and 70°F for the sixth week.

An antibiotic should be administered from the eighth day after vaccination for a period of four days at full strength and a further four days at half strength. Treatment is preferred through the water.

There seems to be some evidence that letting chicks out of the brooder house before three weeks of age can be detrimental. This is particularly important under poor range conditions and during inclement weather.

It appears that there is a better chance of success if vaccination is carried out in any period other than the three coldest months of June, July and August.

The vaccine is a live virus, therefore the birds should not be contaminated in any other place but the site of vaccination.

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