



# Pigeon rotavirus



In March 2019, rotavirus infection was confirmed in racing pigeons in Canterbury and Auckland. Biosecurity New Zealand has put together some advice for pigeon owners to help protect birds from this disease.

## What does it affect?

Pigeon rotavirus has to date (in Australia, Europe and NZ) only affected pigeons (*Columba livia*). The virus has the potential to affect all variants of this species, including racing pigeons, fancy breeds and feral rock pigeons.

Biosecurity New Zealand is working with other agencies and wildlife groups to determine whether the virus affects the New Zealand wood pigeon (kererū) or Chatham Island pigeon (parea). Even though they're both called pigeons, they're not the same species as rock pigeons, so the virus probably doesn't affect them.

The risk to commercial poultry (chickens, ducks, and turkeys) is considered low. This disease doesn't affect humans.

## Symptoms

Signs of disease often include vomiting and diarrhoea. Clinical signs include:

- depression - reluctance to go out and fly
- vomiting/regurgitation
- diarrhoea
- hunched posture
- mortality is generally low (around 5%).

## Good biosecurity

We suggest pigeon owners take good biosecurity measures to limit the spread of the disease. This includes:

### Avoid bringing new diseases in to your flock:

- It's important to be aware that birds may carry the virus even though they appear to have recovered. Australian research suggests a potential carrier state to around 12 weeks.
- Designate specific gumboots and overalls/clothing that never leave the loft area or wear disposable overshoes and/or overalls.

- Do not mix sick birds with other birds – if you do have ill birds, take precautions not to cross-contaminate affected and unaffected areas of the loft, e.g. during litter disposal or by sharing equipment.
- Tend to young pigeons first before moving to older ones, as they may be more susceptible to diseases when young.
- Minimise pigeon introductions, and if required, make appropriate enquiries to ensure they are only from trusted, healthy lofts. If new pigeons are introduced, a 2–3 week quarantine period is recommended where birds are segregated and observed for signs of illness. This will limit the introduction of new pathogens to your flock.
- Clean and disinfect any second-hand equipment, or equipment that needs to move between sick and healthy groups within your flock.
- Restrict visitors to the minimum required.

### Avoid spreading disease from your flock to others:

- Where contact with other pigeons occurs, clean and disinfect clothing and boots. Remove debris first, then follow up with a disinfectant solution (e.g. Virkon, diluted bleach). It is important to remove debris and organic matter first as disinfectants do not work in the presence of excess mud or waste material.
- If your loft has been affected or if you have ill birds for any other reason, you should maintain strict biosecurity measures, including not selling, racing or showing pigeons, enhancing loft hygiene and restricting visitors.
- Be aware that your recovered flocks may pose a risk of spreading disease for up to 12 weeks.



## Treatment

If you suspect your pigeons may be affected by rotavirus, consult your veterinarian for treatment and management advice. In general rotaviral infections require only supportive treatments, such as oral fluids and electrolytes, to ensure the birds are kept well-hydrated and in a positive energy balance until the virus has run its course.

## For more information

- [www.biosecurity.govt.nz](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz)
- New South Wales Department of Primary Industries: Pigeon rotavirus. [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/poultry-and-birds/health-disease/pigeon-rotavirus](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/poultry-and-birds/health-disease/pigeon-rotavirus)

### To report a pest or disease

**Call Biosecurity NZ's Exotic Pest and Disease hotline: 0800 80 99 66**  
**[www.biosecurity.govt.nz/](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/)**

