



Avian Infectious Laryngotracheitis (ILT)

Spring 2025

What is Avian Infectious Laryngotracheitis?

ILT is a highly contagious respiratory disease of domestic chickens caused by a herpesvirus. The disease mainly infects chickens, but other bird species (e.g. pheasants) can also be affected. ILT does not cause disease in people.

Birds that recover from an ILT infection become “carriers” of the virus for life, similar to how people are life-long carriers of the virus that causes cold sores. The ILT virus has the ability to hide in the bird, a process known as “latency” or “silent infection” and is reactivated when the bird is stressed. Stressed birds shed the virus and can infect unvaccinated birds.

Clinical Signs

Domestic poultry of all ages are susceptible. Spread through a poultry house is slow and clinical signs develop 5–14 days after infection.

Signs can be mild to severe and include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Head shaking and extended neck when breathing
- Coughing and sneezing
- A rattling sound while breathing
- Gasping for air
- Coughing up blood-stained mucus
- Watery eyes and/or swollen eyelids (conjunctivitis)



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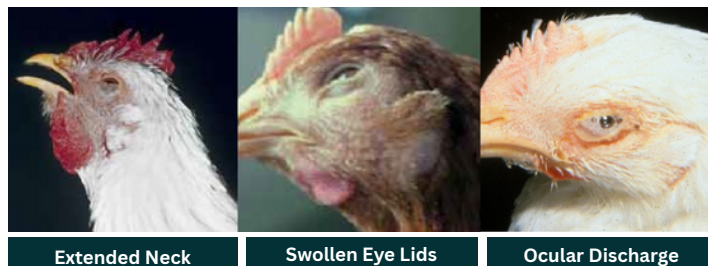
- Depression, inactivity
- Decrease in feed consumption
- Drop in egg production
- Death in five to seventy percent of birds

Diagnosis

Birds showing respiratory distress and coughing up bloody mucus are indicative for ILT. The disease can be confirmed by a laboratory by necropsy, tracheal swabs or blood samples. It is important to submit freshly dead birds or samples early to the lab as the lesions often disappear three to five days after the bird shows signs of infection.

Treatment

There is no treatment for ILT; emergency vaccination of all birds in the flock in the early stage of an outbreak may reduce the spread and limit the outbreak.



Control/Prevention

Vaccination is the preferred control method. However, any vaccination must be approved by the State Veterinarian because of the risk of disease spread. The tissue culture origin (TCO) ILT vaccine administered by eye drop is the preferred vaccine. Other vaccines are live vaccines that result in infection and can spread the disease if vaccinated birds are mixed with unvaccinated birds.

The ILT virus is rapidly inactivated by heat, sunlight and many disinfectants. Flock owners should use biosecurity measures and disinfect hands, clothing, equipment, and vehicles to minimize the risk of carrying infected material into contact with their flock. Disinfectants effective against ILT include household bleach (sodium hypochlorite), iodophors, quaternary ammonium compounds and 5% hydrogen peroxide.

Control of ILT requires early recognition, diagnosis by a laboratory, enhanced biosecurity, and cleaning and disinfection of affected coops. Control of ILT within the poultry industry requires a collaborative effort by poultry owners, veterinarians,

Fair, Show, and Exhibition Poultry

Only take birds to the fair that you are prepared to euthanize if they were to become infected with ILT. Keep birds returning from fairs separate from the rest of the flock for 30 days. If you have sick birds after returning from the fair, please contact the UDAF Animal Health Program.

Other Resources:

[USDA Defend the Flock](#)

[USDA Biosecurity Tips](#)

[Utah State Extension Poultry Resources](#)

[Texas Animal Health Commission ILT Factsheet](#)

[Penn State Extension ILT in Poultry](#)

If you have other questions about ILT, other poultry diseases, or protecting your flock, please contact the UDAF Animal Health Program at (801) 982-2235 or statevet@utah.gov.