

PIGEON POX

Probably one of the oldest best-known diseases of pigeons.

It enters your loft initially from bites from mosquitoes.

The mosquitoes bite the featherless areas of the body, resulting in lesions around the **beak**, **ceres**, **eyelids** and **feet**.

This is **Dry Pox**.

In your loft it **can be spread further** when birds **fight** each other, especially when they are in the **training** and **racing** baskets.

It **can also spread** to the **inside of the mouth**, where the lesions there look like Canker lesions.

This is called "**Wet Pox**".

This form can be because of the **Dry Pox spreading** or because of **spread of the virus** in the dust in the loft.

In **unvaccinated pigeons**, symptoms can be very severe.

Pigeons **can lose** an **eye**, **toes** or even a **whole beak**.

In the **wet form** of the **disease**, **the tongue can be lost**, or lesions can be so severe that the bird is **unable to swallow**, resulting in starvation.

We have seen this in many colonies of feral pigeons.

Vaccination is vitally important in the control of this disease.

Points to remember:

- Vaccination can be given from 5 weeks of age.
- Where possible, all the young birds should be vaccinated at the same time because vaccinated birds have live virus circulating in the blood stream. They can be a source of infection for unvaccinated birds.
- After mixing, the vaccine should be used as quickly as possible.
- Although not essential, old birds can be vaccinated at the same time. Use what is left of the vaccine once the youngsters have been done.
- The vaccine must be administered using the **feather follicle** method. Feathers are pulled from the lateral surface of the thigh and the mixed vaccine is "painted" into the empty feather follicles.
- A "take" is shown in the form of a nodular swelling/crusting at the sight of vaccination.
- This is seen at about 8 days. If not seen, the vaccine can be repeated.
- The method where the vaccine is applied by pricking the skin near the keel bone *is not as effective* as the **feather follicle** method because the blood supply there is poor.

If Pox is seen in your loft where the birds have not yet been vaccinated, they must be vaccinated as soon as possible. In this way, you are providing controlled exposure. Leaving it to spread naturally through the loft like many fanciers do, results in a smouldering infection for a long period of time.

Treatment

Severe clinical cases can be treated with: **Doxybird tablets**.

Lesions near the eye can be treated with: **Sulfacetamide ointment**.

Lesions on the feet are best treated with: **F10 germicidal ointment**.

Content Warning!

Herewith a few photos courtesy of Dr Rob Conradie and Illana Lakofski.

The photos show how severe infections can be.

