

Avian Polyomavirus

Avian polyomavirus (APV) is an important disease in psittacine birds (parrots). APV is of greatest concern in young birds.

Who is affected by avian polyomavirus?

Disease occurs at a young age. Signs are seen in Budgerigar parakeets (“Budgies”) at 1-3 weeks of age, and in other psittacines at 4-16 weeks of age.

If I have an adult bird, should I be concerned?

Yes, adults can be healthy carriers of APV, shedding virus to their young or to other adult birds.

What are the signs of APV?

Signs vary from generalized illness to feather and beak abnormalities to sudden death. The younger the bird, the more severe the signs of disease, and APV is often fatal in young birds. Sudden death is not an uncommon problem.

How is APV transmitted?

APV can be transmitted from the hens to her eggs. In Budgerigars, and likely in other species, APV may also be transmitted by inhalation or ingestion of contaminated feather dust, fecal material, and other secretions.

I own both Budgerigar parakeets and other parrots. Is this a concern?

Budgies can sometimes overcome the illness and become carriers, shedding the disease for life. For this reason, we do not recommend having Budgerigars in the same breeding facility with other species of parrot.

How do we determine if a bird has APV?

A test (DNA probe) is run on a blood sample in most cases, although a feather/skin sample or a swab of internal organs may also be submitted. This test is very sensitive and specific, and incorrect results (false positive or false negative) rarely occur.

What if my bird tests positive?

At this time, we recommend vaccinating the bird, as this seems to help survivability in affected young birds. This is followed up with re-testing as your veterinarian recommends.

Can you cure APV in a sick bird?

NO. APV tends to weaken the immune system, making the bird more susceptible to other diseases they would normally be able to fight off.

Tell me about the vaccine. Should I have my birds vaccinated?

*This vaccine CANNOT be used in Budgerigar parakeets!!

Ideally all baby parrots should come from an APV-negative facility. All babies should be vaccinated every 2 weeks, from 3 weeks old to 9 weeks old.

A bird obtained after 9 weeks of age should be vaccinated if you answer yes to any of the following questions:

- 1) Do you have multiple birds in your house?
- 2). Do you breed birds or plan to?
- 3). Do you plan to board your bird with other birds when you are out of town?

Administer the vaccine to a previously unvaccinated bird in a series of two, repeated in 2-3 weeks, then annually.

The only noted side effect is an occasional local reaction of a small, non-irritating lump at the injection site.

What is the best way to rid a facility of APV?

- Vaccinate all birds.
- Do not keep Budgerigar parakeets with unvaccinated parrots.
- Test all non-vaccinated individuals.
- Practice good quarantine protocol when you get a new bird. Keep new birds as far away from birds confirmed negative, until cleared to do otherwise by your veterinarian.
- Positive but healthy birds can shed the virus and cause huge problems.
- Use dilute bleach to clean environmental surfaces, although items made of wood or other organic materials can never be considered clean and should be thrown out. Dilute bleach at 1 cup per gallon of water. Take precautions with fumes for yourself, other people, and animals!! In some cases, replace air conditioning/furnace filters.
- If you have concerns about APV in your facility, ask your veterinarian about more specifics.

Additional questions or concerns? Contact your avian veterinarian.