

# Young Bird Sickness...The Big Three

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Over the last ten years we have been hearing about young bird sickness as a general condition that affects birds at some point during the first six months of their lives. I will try to explain the three possible afflictions of young bird sickness and offer some insight on how we can limit and control these problems. In a later article I will address PMV, Salmonella and Pox, which are also young bird problems but do not fall under the category of young bird sickness.

What are the signs of young bird sickness? Upchucking, filling up with water, loss of appetite, cheesy lines inside the mouth with crusty yellow formations around the outside of the mouth, weight loss, sleepy eyes, greenish droppings, not digesting feed and watery droppings. These ailments lead to losses, death and in many cases a pigeon that will never ever amount to much of anything.

Let me start with the young bird sickness of all sicknesses.... circovirus. Circovirus has been called the pigeon AIDS virus. A pigeon's immune system is weakened and compromised to the point that other secondary infections run wild. Whether circovirus kills by causing secondary infections or actually destroys the pigeon on its own is in question. My belief is that circovirus may comprise and weaken the immune system but also causes its own set of symptoms and nothing can cure or help the pigeon.

Once introduced to the flock, circovirus causes the pigeons to drink excessively and fill the crop with large volumes of water. Why all the water? That is a good question. Excessive water intake could be to quench a fever or alleviate a digestive system irritation. It could also be due to dehydration since organs (such as kidneys) are failing along with the lower intestine not doing its job. Circovirus does not only cause secondary infections because pigeons stricken with Circo all have the same symptoms. Circo has its own infection process that destroys the pigeon. Once the pigeon is infected with circovirus the chances of recovery are at about 1 in 100.

When a youngster seems lethargic, is not eating well, is a little thin and acting slightly slower than the rest of the pigeons, check the bird for a full crop of water. If this sickly pigeon is blown up with water you probably have Circo virus in the loft. Where does Circo come from? Some pigeons carry the virus and under extreme stress will either show symptoms or shed the virus and infect others. Perhaps the carriers do not get the disease but only shed the virus. No one at this point knows for sure. What I do know is that a thin youngster, leaning slightly forward with a crop filled to the brim with water is not going to recover no matter what you do for it. The occasional youngster can recover but that pigeon may be a carrier of circovirus. Later in this article I will explain what to do to help with this major young bird sickness. Having some very low concentration electrolytes in the water will help some with dehydration.

The second young bird sickness is adenovirus. Adeno this and Adeno that. Adeno has been the catch phrase everyone uses when their babies are upchucking grain, acting lethargic, do not want to fly, have greenish droppings and a small percentage of deaths. Pigeons with either Adeno virus or an E.coli infection digest feed very slowly. If you notice feed in the crop the morning after feeding the pigeons they are suffering from one of the two conditions. I do believe that Adenovirus is a real problem and there are possibly many variations or strains of adenovirus. In most cases when the pigeons are showing the above symptoms (upchucking, etc.) they are battling an E. coli issue. What does a hot strain of E. coli cause? Symptoms include upchucking, greenish droppings, acting lethargic, not wanting to exercise, slow digestion and heavy losses.

In most cases when a fancier believes it is adenovirus, it is probably a fairly lethal E. coli infecting the pigeons. Administering an antibiotic like Amoxicillin usually results in quick improvement. If the pigeons improve quickly (i.e. they are back to normal within a week) you are likely dealing with E. coli. There is also the possibility that the pigeons have the adenovirus and E. coli as a secondary infection. In this case, antibiotics treat the secondary infection of E. coli. The pigeons look better with treatment but once treatment stops there is a longer period before the pigeons go back to normal when afflicted with adenovirus. You may also find that others get sick shortly after the treatment. If the birds are not looking super 10 days after antibiotic treatment the adeno must run its course and it may take 2-3 weeks for the pigeons to fully recover. Some never quite recover until the end of the season.

Where does adenovirus come from? Adeno, like circovirus, is carried by some pigeons. With the addition of stress, high heat and an over-loaded truck full of young birds, adenovirus spreads quickly and infects many. Some fanciers believe that the young must eat the upchucked feed of other infected pigeons but this is not the case. Adenovirus can spread by air or water. I will look at adenovirus treatment options later in the article.

The third deadly and least understood virus that infects young birds is Herpes virus. Most adult pigeons carry the Herpes virus. Therefore, at some point they were exposed but never exhibited symptoms. My recommendation is to expose your youngsters to Herpes virus when they are under the least amount of stress possible. I keep old droppers in with my youngsters. These droppers have lived year after year with the youngsters and have most likely been exposed to Herpes virus many times. The same droppers have lived through two convention races so they have seen it all.

When the babies are very young they are not affected by these viral diseases. You may ask...why do young in the nest seem to never have a problem with any of these viral diseases? The answer is quite simple. When the babies hatch they are passed immunity to the viruses from their parents. They receive immunity from both the egg and crop milk. Immunity is short lived and wears off in six weeks to six months. After this time the babies can become ill with the so called young bird sicknesses.

Getting back to Herpes virus and exposure. By placing the babies with old birds in the young bird loft the babies get exposure to Herpes while they have little to no stress. They are exposed to and build an immunity to Herpes. Should they get exposed again later when under stress the babies will not be

affected. If your young were never exposed then later are exposed under stress they can show visible signs of Herpes.

What are the signs of Herpes? Herpes virus causes the pigeons to have greasy wattles, thin cheesy looking lines inside the mouth, watery sleepy eyes, heads pulled in somewhat, light crust around the beak along with weight loss. Herpes infected young seem to have respiratory problems and canker but this canker looking substance may be a fungus of some sort. This substance in the mouth is light colored and could be all over the mouth and tongue.

The respiratory disease that comes with Herpes tends to affect the head more than the lungs. However, a noticeable straining of breathing can be seen in the wind pipe so the lungs are affected to a lesser extent. Herpes causes respiratory symptoms along with an overall sick, listless pigeon. Not all recover but some do. It is unclear if a pigeon that recovers from Herpes ever amounts to anything. A pigeon that does recover from Herpes may suffer fertility problems or general weakness with lack of vitality.

Herpes, like adeno and circovirus, causes a pigeon to act slightly slower and less responsive than the rest of the flock. This slightly slower motion is hard to notice for some. Healthy pigeons have sharp crisp decisive movements. With experience it is easy to see the sick pigeon just by the movements of the entire group in the loft. I can now glance at a pen of pigeons and within seconds notice a pigeon with a problem. Receiving and exporting over 1000 pigeons each year to the Million Dollar Race in South Africa has honed my skills. Spending every day of my life with pigeons has also helped me to observe subtle issues. Noticing a problem when the symptoms are very discreet will help you get a jump on a sickness. Herpes virus causes a set of secondary infections but I am not sure that treating the secondary infections gives much help to the pigeon. If a pigeon with Herpes Virus is treated in the first couple days after the onset of the symptoms the pigeon has a greater chance of survival. Treating for canker and respiratory is worth trying but once the pigeon reaches the point of looking really sick, nothing is going to help very much.

#### What Can We Do?

For many years fanciers have been tossing every antibiotic imaginable at the sick youngsters with little to no success. When dealing with virus problems, antibiotics are useless. Only Adenovirus which causes E. coli to run wild will be helped by antibiotics. If you have Circo or Herpes virus you are wasting time and money on antibiotics. The antibiotics will not help the Circo or Herpes virus and do not show much promise on the secondary infections.

#### What Can Help With Young Bird Sickness?

One suggestion is to keep your youngsters on either a deep litter system or on grates. The deep litter system tends to strengthen the immune system before the virus problems start see my article 'An Immune System is a Terrible Thing to Waste'.

([http://www.mclaughlinlofts.com/uploads/2013\\_An\\_Immune\\_System\\_is\\_a\\_Terrible\\_Thing\\_to\\_Waste\\_Robin\\_Proof.pdf](http://www.mclaughlinlofts.com/uploads/2013_An_Immune_System_is_a_Terrible_Thing_to_Waste_Robin_Proof.pdf))

Fanciers that dealt with young bird sickness in the past have found that a deep litter is a positive thing and lessens the incidence of young bird sickness. If you are exporting pigeons or have a one loft race, grates may be better so the pigeons are not exposed to droppings or soiled grain. When mixing pigeons from many lofts you will find that pigeons that have traveled under the most stress will be the first to contact and exhibit symptoms of a young bird sickness. I use an all in/all out principle for my Million Dollar exporting and do not mix groups of pigeons. I recommend filling a pen and keeping them as a group. Be careful not to contaminate section to section or pen to pen. Foot baths and constant sanitation will help.

For the fancier that is dealing with his or her own team of pigeons there are several ways to lessen the chances of young bird sickness. For starters, vaccinate for PMV when the pigeons are weaned. At this time I also recommend spraying with Pyrethrum for parasites. One week later vaccinate for Salmonella. These two vaccinations will boost the immune system while the young pigeons are still carrying some parental immunity. Three weeks after the first PMV vaccine, vaccinate a second time. Three weeks after the first salmonella injection, vaccinate for a second time. The pigeon is now 52 days old and has been vaccinated four times. The immune system has been placed on high alert from the vaccinations and the immune system will be more likely to fight other problems when needed. At weaning, the youngsters should have some old birds living in the young bird section so they are also exposed to Herpes virus. As I mentioned earlier, Herpes virus is not going to be much of a problem for the super healthy, stress-free youngsters.

During the first 52 days of life worm the pigeons to eliminate the possible stress that can be caused by worms. Do not overcrowd and make sure that the young have every possible mineral in front of them. Nothing causes weakness faster in pigeons than lack of minerals. To see what I use for minerals you can watch my [mineral video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diWXJ3u8yqE&feature=youtu.be). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diWXJ3u8yqE&feature=youtu.be>

Keep the young bird loft completely dry and use deep litter that is changed after the worming. Plenty of air movement and ventilation is very important. Sunlight is also critical. The more air, sun, minerals, quality grain and pellets the better during the first six months of the pigeon's life. Minerals are actually more important than the type and quality of the feed.

If you are dealing with your own personal young bird team I suggest using a deep litter of wood pellets. These are the same wood pellets sold as Pellet Fuel for pellet burning stoves. A 40 pound bag costs about \$4.50 and covers 25 square feet.

If you have taken care of the vaccinations, minerals, dryness, sun light, and ventilation along with parasites and worms, your young should be just fine. Sometimes, however, no matter how hard we try there will be a problem. Do not forget external parasites cause stress. This is an easy fix.

What Helps Once a Problem Starts?

There will be a day when you enter the loft and realize you are dealing with one of the young bird sicknesses or worse yet a combination as described above. The first step would be to start Amoxicillin and hope you are dealing with adenovirus or just a hot strain of E. coli. Amoxicillin 10% can be

purchased at any of the pigeon supply houses. You should always have a container on hand. Remove the sick youngsters, clean and sanitize the loft and start a flock treatment. It is helpful if you can place the affected young in a sick bay on wire for treatment.

In this great pigeon sport of ours the old timers instruct “one teaspoon to the gallon” no matter what the antibiotic. This has been the accepted dose for nearly everything. What I do know for sure is that one teaspoon to the gallon of amoxicillin 10% is too low of a dose. I would use two to three teaspoons to the gallon. Amoxicillin is very safe and effective. I have used massive doses of amoxicillin to save a pigeon that was at death’s door. A dose of 500mg of Amoxicillin mixed with an ounce of water and syringed down the throat may even save an old pigeon experiencing adeno type 2. You have to catch this in the first few hours of the start of the symptoms to save the pigeon.

Give at least two teaspoons to the gallon of Amoxicillin for five days as a test. If the pigeons look better you can continue the dose for five more days followed by a probiotic. If after five days there is no improvement you can stop the amoxicillin and go onto the next product. You are dealing with one of the viral young bird sicknesses if the amoxicillin has not effect.

The next product to try is a great disinfectant made by Dupont called Virkon S. To learn about Virkon S and the possibilities please see [Secret 1. http://www.mclaughlinlofts.com/Secrets\\_.html](http://www.mclaughlinlofts.com/Secrets_.html) The Virkon S helps stop the spread of the viral infections and has a positive effect on the pigeons. Why and how it works is not exactly known. The Virkon S may eliminate canker and also helps knockout the cheesy white substance in the pigeon’s mouth found with Herpes. Virkon S also seems to have a positive effect on the upper respiratory tract and will help reduce swelling in the intestine. Some fanciers experience an immediate health improvement when using Virkon S. Other fanciers have had less luck. Virkon S at  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon to the gallon is worth a try for ten days. Continue to clean and sanitize with Virkon S and remove sick youngsters. Mix fresh solutions of Virkon S daily.

There will be deaths with Herpes and circovirus. If your pigeons are extremely healthy before the start of the young bird sickness your death count should be low and the problem will run its course relatively fast with the Virkon S in the water. If your pigeons are kept in less than optimal conditions, are mineral deficient and overcrowded, the death count will be high. Be consistent with your cleaning and sanitizing during the sickness. Once the problem is over you will want to give outstanding care and probiotics for several days. You will notice a decrease in water consumption when the problem is ending. The pigeons need a couple weeks after the visible symptoms subside to fully recover before you can start the exercising process again.

One more product that McLaughlin Lofts uses, 4-5 days per week all spring and summer is Van Beek’s Avian Solution. This is a natural product made from an Oregano extract. It works as well as the antibiotics and seems to help young bird sickness from striking and or spreading in the first place. This product may also offer some sort of immune system boost. See [Secret 25. http://www.mclaughlinlofts.com/Secrets\\_.html](http://www.mclaughlinlofts.com/Secrets_.html) The Million Dollar Pigeons that arrive at our lofts for export to South Africa are on the Avian Solution every day for the entire export season.

I hope this article is helpful and offers a few possibilities in controlling, preventing and dealing with young bird sicknesses. Sooner or later the sickness will come so hopefully you will be ready to deal with the problems.

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