



# Infectious Laryngotracheitis

**Alternate Names:** ILT.

**Species Affected:** Poultry. Chickens, pheasants, and peafowl are more severely affected.

**What causes ILT?** Gallid alphaherpesvirus type I, also known as Infectious Laryngotracheitis Virus (ILTV) which affects the respiratory system of poultry. After active disease the virus hides in a lymph node of the bird until the bird is under stress and the virus becomes active again (like how a cold sore /lip blister virus does in humans).

**How is ILT transmitted?** The ILTV is highly contagious, and it's shed through chicken respiratory fluids. Chickens get infected via direct contact with ILTV carrier birds. Contaminated footwear, clothing, bedding, tools, and equipment are also sources of ILTV.

**What are the clinical signs of ILT?** Clinical signs usually occur 5-12 days after exposure. In severe cases birds show inactivity, reduced feed consumption, drop in egg production, sneezing, coughing mucus or blood, constant head shaking, nose and eye discharge, face swelling, appearance of bubbles/foamy liquid around the eyes, rales (gurgling sounds), and difficulty breathing (birds stretch their neck and gasp) leading to death.

Birds with mild forms of ILT have less severe respiratory signs that may go unnoticed.

**What are the consequences of ILT?** Significant economic loss due to reduced egg production, delayed growth, and death. Infected birds remain carriers of ILTV for life. Stress situations such as transport, illness, or mixing into a new flock reactivate shedding of the ILTV.

**How is ILT detected?** Based on clinical signs, flock history (e.g. introduction of new birds to the flock), and observation of damage to the trachea on dead birds. Because clinical signs of ILT are like those of other severe diseases such as avian

influenza, infectious bronchitis, and Newcastle disease, laboratory tests are necessary for confirmation. ILTV isolation, PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction, a molecular test to detect viral DNA) and histopathology (observation of tissues under a microscope) can confirm ILTV.

**How is ILT prevented?** Good biosecurity helps prevent the introduction of ILTV into poultry flocks. Examples of biosecurity include keeping poultry in designated areas restricted to visitors, using clean footwear before entering poultry areas, using clean tools and equipment for poultry chores, and following a pest control program. The main source of ILTV is the introduction of infected adult birds, the safest way to expand your flock is to introduce newly hatched chicks.

There are vaccines available in Canada to help control ILT. Once a bird has been vaccinated it will become carrier of the vaccination ILTV, under stress the virus can be reactivated putting susceptible birds at risk of ILT. Consultation with your veterinarian to determine if your flock needs vaccination and to select the most appropriate vaccine product for your birds is recommended.

**How can ILT be treated?** There is no specific treatment for ILT. Good husbandry practices including adequate nutrition, clean environment and water, and appropriate temperature help chickens recover from clinical signs of ILT, although they will be carriers of the virus for life.

**Is ILT a Reportable disease?** Yes, because of its severity and consequences, all suspect and confirmed cases of ILT in British Columbia must be reported within 24 hours to the [Office of the Chief Veterinarian](#).

**Is ILT zoonotic (transmitted from animals to humans)?** No

#### References:

- Garcia, M. (2022, October). *Infectious laryngotracheitis in poultry - poultry*. Merck Veterinary Manual. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/poultry/infectious-laryngotracheitis/infectious-laryngotracheitis-in-poultry>