

Pigeon Paramyxovirus: PPMV, Twisted Neck Disease

If you see a pigeon that is pecking at seed but missing it, tossing seed backwards over its head when it manages to pick one up, twisting its head at



an unnatural angle or upside down , looking dizzy , looking drunk or spinning in circles, then the most likely cause is pigeon paramyxovirus.

This is a list of the symptoms that you could find in a pigeon with Paramyxovirus, not all affected pigeons display all the symptoms:

- Thin broken solid droppings in a pool of liquid
- Fine tremor of eyes or head
- Staggering
- Somersaulting in flight
- Crash landing
- Difficulty picking up seed, pecking and missing.
- Tossing seed backwards
- Twisting neck, head upside down (torticollis, star gazing) – see photo.
- Paralysis of legs or wings
- Spiralling in flight
- Flying backwards
- Turning in circles
- Having fits
- Suddenly dropping off to sleep, head slumped forwards (zonking out!)
- Pulling head backwards towards tail.

Despite the severity of the symptoms the pigeons don't often appear to be in discomfort or ill, we tend to describe them as “otherwise well”! However, the pigeon will need to be caught in order to isolate it from other pigeons that

might become infected and to give it the supportive care that it will need to survive the disease.

Pigeon PMV can damage a pigeon's nervous system. Some pigeons make a quick recovery but can have the symptoms (not the virus) return weeks or months later, some will take longer as the healing process can be very slow, others will have residual nervous symptoms for the rest of their lives and will be unreleasable.

If you decide to take a pigeon with paramyxovirus to a rescue centre or to a vet the most likely outcome is that it will be euthanased, because PPMV is an infectious disease that requires the bird to be isolated from other pigeons for at least 6 weeks and most centres don't have the resources to do that. However, there are a few rescue centres that are equipped for nursing pigeons with PMV and some will be able to offer them a permanent haven if they don't make a complete recovery.

PIGEON PARAMYXOVIRUS is a viral disease that does not affect man or animals, but a human that handles a pigeon with PMV or the live vaccine can develop conjunctivitis if sensible precautions are not taken (eg, do not touch your eyes immediately after handling a pigeon with PMV or the live vaccine).

The incubation period can vary from a few days to several weeks. The most common symptoms seen by the rescuer, though only a few will be seen at the same time are : Pigeon turning in circles, difficulty picking up seed, pecking and missing, tossing seed backwards, staggering, extremely watery poops, thin broken solid droppings in a pool of liquid, fine tremor of eyes or head somersaulting in flight, crash landing, twisting neck, head upside down (torticollis, star gazing) , spiraling in flight, flying backwards , having fits,



walking backwards.

Some of these symptoms are found in other illnesses, **but not in the same combination**. The presence of PPMV antibodies can be established by a blood test, I would advise anyone who suspects PMV and wants this confirmed, or wants to eliminate other causes of the symptoms, to use the [Retford Poultry Partnership](#) postal testing service.

Wildlife Rescue Centres tend to diagnose PMV on a combination of symptoms, eg polyuria (passing a lot of water) and polydipsia (drinking a lot of water) without weight loss, or polyuria and nervous symptoms.

During the recovery period keep pigeons with Pigeon PMV in a quiet, warm (not hot) cage with soft flooring away from any intense light source. Provide a brick for perching.

To ensure that they are able to pick up food place seed in a deep dish so that if they stab at random they can pick seed up.

Because Pigeon PMV can cause fits pigeons are at risk of drowning but they need free access to water. Provide water (with added electrolytes if possible) in a deep narrow container to minimise the risk of accidental drowning. Watch the pigeon to ensure it is drinking.

Hand feeding may be necessary. Frozen peas and sweetcorn thawed in hot water for about 10 minutes can be hand fed as in this video.