

**Advice 08-2017 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on the draft royal decree on the control of Newcastle's disease in poultry.****Background & Terms of reference**

Newcastle's disease (NCD) is a very contagious and severe disease of poultry which is caused by virulent strains ("velogenic") of avian paramyxovirus serotype 1, called Newcastle disease virus (NDV). If no strict and effective control measures are taken, the infection rapidly assumes epidemic proportions. A specific adapted strain (PPMV1 of Pigeon Paramyxovirus 1), which is very contagious and pathogenic, is circulating amongst pigeons. Moreover, this PPMV1 strain is transmittable to other poultry species.

Besides good bio-security and hygiene practices, the control of NCD consists mainly of vaccination of poultry and the slaughter of infected poultry or poultry that are at risk of being infected (protective zone). Since 1993, a mandatory vaccination is installed for:

- all animals of poultry farms with more than 100 animals;
- all poultry which are present on gatherings (exhibitions, shows, races, markets and the like)
- pigeons participating in races and gatherings (e.g. exhibitions).

Since the installation of mandatory vaccination in 1993, Belgium has no longer recorded NCD in poultry on professional poultry holdings. The last case of NCD in poultry of hobby holdings dates from 1998. Cases of PPMV1 strains of NCD in pigeons are however still frequently recorded.

The Scientific Committee is asked to give an advice on the draft royal decree on the control of Newcastle's disease.

Most articles of the draft royal decree are a transposition of the Directive 92/66/EEG. However, the royal decree of 28 November 1994 on the control of Newcastle's disease needed to be amended for the following reasons:

- to provide a legal base for the delegation of vaccination of the veterinarian towards the poultry farmer within the framework of a written agreement of veterinary farm guidance, to offer a solution to the problems with mass vaccination of poultry;
- to introduce a mandatory vaccination of racing pigeons, which is currently only regulated by 2 ministerial circulars of the year 2000;
- general modernization of the articles and structure of the current royal decree. Moreover, the regulations have been brought in accordance with current legislation of the FASFC

**Methodology**

The evaluation of the draft royal decree is based on data from scientific literature and on expert opinion.

**Recommendations**

The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the present draft royal decree is of good quality and largely agrees with the proposed modifications. Only a limited number of remarks are formulated.

For the vaccination against NCD, mainly attenuated live vaccines are used. These vaccines are delicate and their efficacy is strictly linked with the respect of the vaccination protocol (percentage of vaccinated animals, circumstances during storage and preparation of the vaccine, injected dose, etc...) which explains why a 'herd immunity' (group immunity) is not always guaranteed. If a delegation of vaccination towards the poultry farmer is to take place,

it is advisable to install a serological screening for poultry in professional poultry farms to verify the efficacy of the vaccination.

The Scientific Committee is in favor of stimulating vaccination on all poultry holdings, i.e. including (small) hobby holdings. A sufficient protection by means of vaccination of poultry on these holding would indeed lower the infection pressure for the professional holdings. Moreover, this vaccination is in accordance with certain social changes such as the increasing importance of animal welfare and the fact that poultry are increasingly kept as pets by private individuals.

Concerning the vaccination of pigeons, it is important to vaccinate all pigeons on a holding (not only the racing pigeons) and by extension all poultry on hobby farms to maximally interrupt virus circulation.

As mentioned in the royal decree, a possible slaughter of a pigeon holding has to be based on the epidemiological situation and on a risk assessment. However, the Committee is of the opinion that vaccinated and sound animals on a pigeon holding do not need to be slaughtered but only need to be put in quarantine. This measure could also be applied on uninjured (and vaccinated) poultry holdings located in the protection zone and hobby poultry. This could be an important incentive for the general vaccination of hobby poultry.

Finally, a number of specific remarks are formulated.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.