

Animal Health News

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Animal Health News is published by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Division of Animal Health, in cooperation with USDA-APHIS-Veterinary Services. Its purpose is to provide information on animal disease and disease control regulations to the state's veterinary and animal agriculture community. For information, contact Donna Gilson, 608-224-5130 or e-mail: donna.gilson@datcp.state.wi.us

A message from the State Veterinarian

*By Clarence Siroky, DVM
State Veterinarian*

Administrator, Division of Animal Health

We're coming to the end of a year that will surely go down as a turning point in human history. Most of the world sees September 11 as the date when everything changed. Those of us who work in animal health could well cite February 20 as the day the world shifted. That was the day when the first cases of foot-and-mouth disease were confirmed in Great Britain. It's often been referred to as a wake-up call for veterinarians, government agencies, and citizens – and we've all been wide awake ever since.

Consider the headlines in 2001:

- Millions of animals slaughtered in UK and Europe, North America on high alert
- Vermont sheep trucked cross-country after court battle
- West Nile virus pushes into Midwest
- Wisconsin hit with equine encephalitis outbreak
- BSE advancing into Europe, Japan
- Chronic wasting disease spreads in Colorado
- Anthrax – old disease, new threat

Add to these extraordinary stories the more common ones of food recalls because of salmonella, *E. coli* and listeria contamination. And let's not forget rabies and a host of other zoonotic diseases.

It seems animal health is big news. In a way, that fact in itself is news to us in the field. We're accustomed to working out of the limelight. But if we ever doubted the value of our work, if we ever forgot to keep an eye on the world, if we ever let diseases rarely or never seen disappear from our radar screen, if we ever thought we had all the training we needed – 2001 proved us wrong.

I don't think many of us needed those reminders, though. The issues that policy-makers and citizens suddenly saw in the past 12 months are issues that we've made our life's work. They have always been there — behind the scenes, out of the public eye.

Let's hope this is more than animal health's 15 minutes of fame. We need this new awareness to translate into public vigilance and public resources to continue doing our work. Human health and our economic future may depend on it.

May 2002 be a better year for humans and animals alike.





The mosquito-horse connection

Eastern equine encephalitis outbreak hits Wisconsin

Wisconsin's long warm autumn had the unfortunate side effect of extending the mosquito season –and along with it, the Eastern equine encephalitis outbreak that first hit Wisconsin in mid-July, killing dozens of horses over 3½ months. In addition, two pheasants found dead in September tested positive for EEE.

Epidemiologist Dr. Suzanne N. Gibbons-Burgener of the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and Dr. Linda Glaser of the Wisconsin Division of Public Health tracked the cases. Here is the record as of Nov. 26:

- 86 suspected cases, and 42 of those tested. 25 confirmed by serum and/or brain tissue tests, 17 negative tests
- Of the 69 cases of confirmed or presumptive diagnosis, 67 were horses and 2 were pheasants
- Of 67 horses with confirmed or presumptive diagnoses, 42 were found dead, died or were euthanized; 1 recovered; and 24 cases had unknown outcomes
- Counties with confirmed cases – Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Chippewa, Forest, Marathon, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer, Shawano, St. Croix, Taylor, Vernon, Washburn, Winnebago
- Counties with suspected cases only – Lincoln, Monroe, Racine, Wood
- None of the animals tested for WNV and/or rabies showed positive results

West Nile virus arrives in Badger State

Since it was first identified in the U.S. in 1999, West Nile virus has swept across the eastern half of the nation. It hit Wisconsin in August and has now crossed the Mississippi River, moving into Iowa and Missouri. So far it's been found only in crows here in Wisconsin.

State Veterinarian Dr. Clarence Siroky immediately authorized use in the state of the West Nile virus vaccine, conditionally approved by the USDA, and recommended that horse owners contact their veterinarians for vaccination.

Crows have been the primary sentinel species in WNV surveillance. In Wisconsin, the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Public Health and local public health agencies collected dead birds including crows, ravens, blue jays and hawks to test for WNV. The first positive tests showed up in two crows found in late July in Milwaukee County. As the long fall progressed, birds

The age was unknown for many of the affected horses; those with an age listed ranged from yearlings to 32, although most were no older than 8 years. In the vast majority of cases, the horses were unvaccinated or had unknown vaccination status. A few had been vaccinated in the days just before the onset of clinical signs.

A quick refresher: Equine encephalitis typically appears in mid-summer to early fall. The Eastern strain is the most virulent, with up to 90 percent mortality. Clinical signs in horses include depression, appetite loss, drooping eyelids and lower lip, aimless wandering and circling, and blindness. Eventually the infected horse can no longer stand, and death usually comes within two or three days. Like other arboviruses, EEE cycles among birds, mosquitoes and horses.

Until this summer, EEE occurred at a rate of perhaps one case every three to five years — hats off to the alert private practice veterinarians who spotted a disease most have never seen.

No one can say whether outbreaks will recur next summer. Our best advice is for you to urge your clients to be alert to clinical signs that might indicate either EEE or West Nile virus, and to vaccinate their animals for both diseases and to allow you to submit samples for testing when warranted.

found in Kenosha, Racine, Waukesha and Dane counties also tested positive for the arbovirus.

As of Nov. 20, USDA Veterinary Services reported 413 confirmed cases of WNV in horses in 19 states for 2001 –

Illinois and Indiana being the closest to Wisconsin. Florida had 303 cases. Of 295 horses for which an outcome was reported, at least 71 died or were euthanized.

WNV causes encephalitis in horses. It does not spread between horses.

Clinical signs include listlessness, stumbling and incoordination, limb weakness, ataxia and partial paralysis. Fever is not generally observed.

American Home Products, Fort Dodge, Iowa, received a one-year conditional approval for its WNV vaccine on August 1. So far the vaccine has been safe and efficacious, and we recommend vaccination of horses.

Remind your clients about mosquito control. Remove items where standing water can collect and avoid pasturing near swampy areas.

CWD found in Colorado captive elk

Chronic wasting disease is garnering much public attention as it moves out of the wild and into domestic elk herds.

CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy that has become endemic among wild deer and elk herds in the area where the Wyoming, Nebraska and Colorado boundaries meet. To date, five states have also diagnosed CWD in captive elk herds: Colorado, Nebraska, Montana, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

The most recent flareup began in September, when the Colorado Department of Agriculture quarantined three ranches in three different locations in northeastern Colorado. The quarantines resulted from two confirmed cases of CWD and one suspected case. In the following weeks, epidemiologists traced the cases back to one of the three ranches, Elk Echo in Stoneham. Animals from Elk Echo had been shipped to other ranches as well.

Eventually, 1,500 animals at nine Colorado facilities were quarantined and 135 were euthanized so authorities could examine the brains for lesions. Four animals from two ranches tested positive. Those two ranches remain under quarantine.

On Nov. 26, the Colorado Department of Agriculture declared it was “getting a handle on the disease” and lifted that moratorium on any interstate movement of captive elk. Movement restrictions remain in place for northeastern Colorado, where the two quarantined herds are and where the disease is considered endemic.

Three ranches in Wisconsin also received a total of 17 elk from the Colorado ranch. One of the elk left Wisconsin immediately, and one died before there was any reason to believe it should be tested. The remaining 15 are alive and under quarantine. Of those, 10 will be released this month because they will have been under quarantine for five years with no sign of CWD. The USDA is negotiating with the owner of the other five animals to buy them for euthanasia and diagnosis.

We are continuing our voluntary surveillance program, with 65 of Wisconsin’s 350 deer and elk farms participating. Participants agree to have animals that die tested for CWD; in return, they receive certification when they export animals that their herd has been CWD-free from the date of their enrolling. Different states demand varying lengths of CWD-free status for animals imported into their borders.

The Department of Natural Resources has also conducted voluntary surveillance during the past two gun seasons, seeking permission from hunters to take brain tissue samples from whitetail deer shot during the season.

Classic CWD signs in deer/elk 18 months or older include poor body condition, tremors, stumbling, increased salivation, difficulty swallowing, and excessive thirst or

urination. Usually, months to years pass from when the animal is infected to when it shows signs of disease. There is no way to test a live animal for CWD.

USDA scrapie program launched

The new federal program to eradicate scrapie began Nov. 19, but the USDA has announced it will be lenient in enforcement for the first few months to give producers time to learn about the requirements.

Under the program, most sheep and some goats 18 months and older need official identification numbers before moving off the farm or changing ownership. Breeding sheep and goats also will need certificates of veterinary inspection to move between states. The requirements had already been in place for sheep and goats that are scrapie-exposed, suspect, high-risk, or test-positive. Owners of commercial whiteface breeding sheep have until Feb. 19, 2002, to comply with the ID and movement requirements.

Producers can call the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in Madison to get official numbers and free eartags when they want to move or sell animals. The toll-free number for the APHIS office in Wisconsin is 1-866-USDA-TAG (873-2824). Tattoos are acceptable identification markers instead of eartags.

Sheep and goats that need identification are:

- Breeding sheep, regardless of age
- All sheep 18 months and older
- Breeding goats except low-risk commercial goats (raised for fiber and/or meat, not registered or exhibited, no contact with sheep, not scrapie-positive, not high-risk or exposed to scrapie, not from an infected or source herd)
- Sheep and goats for exhibition, except castrated males
- Sheep and goats at high risk of scrapie, exposed to scrapie, or testing positive for scrapie

Sheep and goats that need no ID are:

- Sheep under 18 months going to slaughter
- Goats going to slaughter
- Wethers for exhibition
- Low-risk commercial goats

While the USDA program does not require a CVI for animals moved for grazing, individual states may require the certificate for grazing animals coming into their borders.

Scrapie is not widespread in the United States, and there are no known infected flocks in Wisconsin.

For more information, call 1-866-873-2824 toll-free, or go to www.animalagriculture.org/scrapie and www.aphis.usda.gov/scrapie.htm on the Web.

Focus on bovine tuberculosis

Cervids: Changes in interstate movement requirements

By Donald O'Connor, DVM
Staff Epidemiologist, Division of Animal Health

The U.D. Department of Agriculture has published new regulations for tuberculosis testing before shipping cervids interstate. The USDA now classifies all states as modified accredited states or zones. These new federal regulations supersede Wisconsin's import rules.

Below is a brief summary of the new regulations. For exact wording, check the Code of Federal Regulations online (<http://www.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html#page1>). Search for "bovine tuberculosis" and view CFR 77.27 and 77.36) or call us at 608-224-4872.

Cervids that **are not** from a qualified herd may be moved interstate if they meet one of the following conditions:

- They originate in a modified accredited state or zone, and have not been infected with or exposed to tuberculosis.
- They go directly to slaughter at an approved facility.
- They are from an accredited herd and accompanied by certification that testing was done within 24 months before movement.
- They are sexually intact, not from an accredited herd, and officially identified. They need certification they originated from a herd with a negative whole-herd test within a year. If that test was more than six months ago, they must have tested negative within 90 days.

Cervids that **are** from a qualified herd may move interstate under these conditions:

- The owner has official documentation that the herd is classified as a qualified herd.
- They are not known to be infected with or exposed to tuberculosis, and are accompanied by a certificate that they are from a qualified herd and have tested negative within 90 days before movement.
- Cervids under one year old that are natural additions to the qualified herd or that were born in and originate from a classified herd may move interstate without further testing, if the certificate accompanying them states those conditions and that they have not been exposed to cervids from an unclassified herd.
- Captive cervids being moved interstate for exhibition do not need further testing if they return within 90 days, have no contact with other livestock during movement and exhibition, and are accompanied by a certificate that

says they are from a qualified herd and meet the requirements for movement.

For qualified tuberculosis-free herd status, all animals a year and older must be tested, plus all animals that are not natural additions within 7 months. To maintain qualified status, the herd must be retested within 9-15 months.

In addition to the new federal regulations, anyone importing cervids into Wisconsin also needs a pre-entry permit from the Division of Animal Health. For information on the import requirements for other states, contact the state veterinarian's office for the state of destination or check our Web site (<http://datcp.state.wi.us/ah/agriculture/animals/animal-movement/index.html>), which offers links to other states' requirements.

Reporting TB responders

By Donald O'Connor, DVM
Staff Epidemiologist, Division of Animal Health

For either the single cervical or the caudal-fold tuberculin tests, a positive response (responder) is any reaction that a veterinarian can see or palpate. This includes circumscribed responses as well as a diffuse or notable skin thickening.

These reactions can be caused by *Mycobacterium bovis* or related bacteria. The main cause of non-specific reactions in Wisconsin could be *Mycobacterium avium* var. *paratuberculosis* or any of the Group I, II, III, or IV Runyon organisms (*M. kansasii* or *M.*

fortuitum). The specificity for the single cervical and caudal fold tests ranges from 95-98 percent (2-5 percent false positives). Because there is no correlation between the size or type of reaction and infection, you should report all reactions immediately.

All CFT or SCT responders are retested by either a state or federal veterinarian, using the comparative cervical test (CCT). In accordance with the Uniform Methods and Rules for Tuberculosis Eradication, the CCT may be injected within 10 days of the CFT or SCT injection, or after 60 days (CFT) or 90 days (SCT). Missing the 10-day window for the CCT will result in a herd quarantine until the responder is resolved, which may be a hardship for your client.

Report TB responders to the Animal Health Division (608-224-4872), the Veterinary Services office in Wisconsin (608-270-4000), or your district veterinarian. (See page 5.) **Please make certain that you talk to a live regulatory person.** Do not leave a message on an answering machine, or with clerical staff or family members.

Look for *Caudal-fold Tuberculin Test*, a Michigan State University publication included with this newsletter.

Johne's program making headway

Wisconsin's plan for getting Johne's disease out in the open and under control is moving ahead, with about 370 herds tested and classified so far for 2001, and another 214 in the process. In addition, the new state budget more than doubles the funding available to reimburse farmers for some of their laboratory costs.

The Johne's Disease Management Market Program is voluntary, available to cattle and goat producers. Farmers who participate test their herds annually and get a herd classification based on the number of animals testing positive. Producers may test the whole herd at once, split the herd for testing of all eligible animals over a year, or randomly test 10 percent of eligible animals or 30, whichever is greater. Classification standards are:

Class	Standard
A	No positive animals
B	<5 percent positive (for whole herd only)
C	<15 percent positive (for whole herd only)
D	At least one animal positive for random test, or more than 15 percent positive for whole herd test
Max. risk	No official herd test

Here are the 2001 classifications as of Nov. 14:

Classification	# of Herds
A	146 (~38%)
B	95 (~25%)
C	106 (~28%)
D	30 (~8%)
Total	377

In our first round of testing reimbursement, for herd owners whose herds were classified in 2000, we distributed \$68,000 to 277 producers. We were able to give the maximum reimbursement of \$5 per test. Producers whose herds have been or will be classified in 2001 have until Feb. 1, 2002, to apply for reimbursement. We have up to \$250,000 to reimburse producers for 2001 testing.

An information sheet on the reimbursement program is included with this newsletter. We encourage you to give copies to your clients. If you would like copies or an electronic version, please call 608-224-5130 or email donna.gilson@datcp.state.wi.us Also included with this newsletter is information to answer your questions about submitting Johne's test samples for herd classification.

In light of recent events in our nation, as well as the FMD outbreak in the United Kingdom earlier this year, we remind you to call your district veterinarian if you suspect a reportable disease. You can find a complete list of reportable diseases on our Web site at <http://datcp.state.wi.us/ah/agriculture/animals/disease/reporting-disease/>, along with special procedures for reporting suspected foreign animal diseases. Those marked with * are foreign animal disease diagnosticians.

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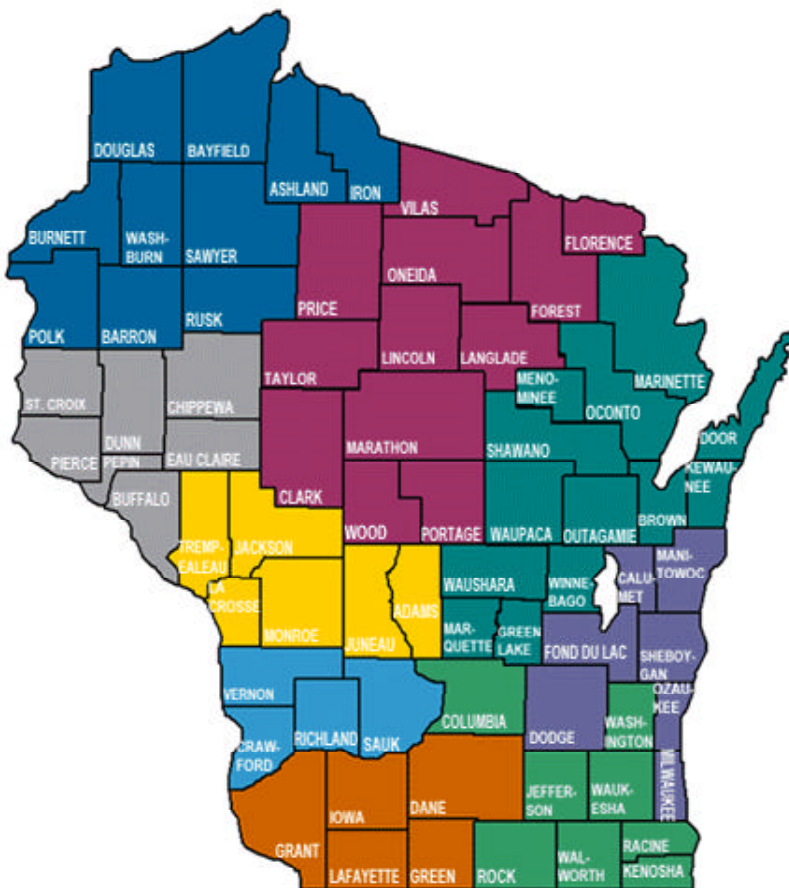
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Fish health advisories: Largemouth bass virus, whirling disease

By Myron Kebus, MS, DVM
Aquaculture Veterinarian, Division of Animal Health

Whirling disease and largemouth bass virus are on the list of fish diseases we don't have in Wisconsin – and don't want. We have issued fish health advisories on both diseases to the state's aquaculture and sport fishing industries.

Largemouth bass virus (LMBV) infects adult bass in the wild, severely enlarging the swimbladder, although the fish appears normal. Whirling disease, caused by the parasite *Myxobolus cerebralis*, affects trout and salmon. It may cause skeletal deformities, loss of equilibrium, a whirling swimming pattern, and death. Neither disease appears to pose a human health risk, and neither has been found in Wisconsin to date.

Largemouth bass virus Last fall the virus was isolated from largemouth bass in a lake in southwestern Michigan. It's also been found in lakes in 15 other states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

This is a new disease. In the wild, LMBV has been reported only in largemouth bass. However, other species have been infected in laboratory experiments. We do not know exactly how LMBV is transmitted, and we do not have sufficient information to say that it is not in other lakes or other states. We do not know what activities contribute to its spread. Boats, fishing tackle and angling practices are believed by many experts to be important factors. Consequently, anglers need to be diligent about cleaning fishing equipment, boats and trailers when moving them from one body of water to another, especially if they use these items in states where LMBV has been found. Do not move fish from one body of water to another.

The Division of Animal Health recommends that fish that have had any contact with infected lakes not be used for stocking in Wisconsin. We will continue to instruct veterinarians who assess on-farm fish health in proper procedures to detect the virus.

Whirling disease Whirling disease has been isolated from trout from a stream in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, as well as from numerous streams and hatcheries in the Lower Peninsula. It is widespread nationally, reported in 22 other states: Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Apparently only trout, salmon and related species are affected. Whirling disease is transmitted to fish from tubifex worms. The tubifex worms require earthen-bottom ponds or streams to develop.

Once established, whirling disease can spread as infected fish move up or down stream. The parasite may be transferred by mud on waders, boots, boats, or other items moved between infected and uninfected areas. Fish-eating birds may transfer the parasite spores in their feces.

The Division of Animal Health requires that all aquaculture trout and salmon (private and state-supported) for stocking into public waters be tested for whirling disease. The test is available at Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. We are doing surveillance with aquaculture veterinarians, fish farms, and the Department of Natural Resources.

To minimize the risk of introducing either of these diseases, fish farmers and private pond owners should purchase fish only from fish farms registered with the Division of Animal Health. Imported fish should have certificates of veterinary health and import permits from the Division.

If the veterinarian finds or suspects either of these diseases, he/she should immediately report it to Dr. Myron Kebus at the Division of Animal Health (DATCP), 608-224-4876.

Animal ID: Keep it easy, flexible, market-driven, farmers say

Keep it simple, but make it mandatory.

That was the message from farmers and agribusiness at a recent series of meetings on agricultural product identification, and that is the message Wisconsin officials sent to the U.S. Animal Health Association and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The FDA funded the project because of its food safety underpinnings.

Veterinarians know only too well the pitfalls of the current "system." First, it's not *a* system. It's numbers for this vaccination and that vaccination, breed ID, and the latest addition, scrapie ID numbers. And none of them are recorded where they're easily accessible when needed.

The main comments:

- Any ID system should be mandatory, so the highest-risk producers are involved.
- Both regulatory agencies and private organizations must be involved in the system.
- Premises identification numbers would be a good basis for the identification system.
- The system must be cost-effective, easy to use, and flexible enough for both high- and low-technology operations to use.
- The market must be the driving force behind the system, with identification required upon change of ownership

We hope to have a pilot ID system in place within the next year or two.

Word of warning: Veterinary clinics may breed salmonella

A recent report in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report should serve as a caution to small animal veterinary clinics to beware the risk of salmonella infections.

MMWR reported Aug. 24 on three 1999 outbreaks of multi-drug resistant *Salmonella typhimurium* – two at small animal clinics and one at an animal shelter. These outbreaks were the first in the United States in which the DT104 strain of *S. typhimurium* was associated with pets. In each case, at least some of the isolates were resistant to some or all of the following antibiotics: ampicillin, ceftriaxone, cephalothin, chloramphenicol, clavulanic acid/amoxicillin, gentamicin, kanamycin, streptomycin, sulfamethoxazole, and tetracycline.

Clinics, humane societies can now sell dog licenses

By Yvonne Bellay, DVM, MS
State Humane Officer, Division of Animal Health

The recently enacted state budget contains a provision that should be of interest to veterinarians and humane societies. Effective September 1, 2001, they may sell dog licenses.

Specifically, the new language states:

“Veterinarians and humane societies may voluntarily become collecting officials for a city, village, or town if the governing body . . . by resolution or ordinance provides that veterinarians and humane societies may be collecting officials. . .”

It is important to note two facts about this new provision. First, the local municipality must pass a specific resolution or ordinance stating that veterinarians and/or humane societies can become collecting officials and sell dog licenses. Then any veterinarian or humane society that chooses to participate may do so. That brings us to the second important fact: *There is no requirement for participation; it is strictly voluntary.*

Veterinarians and humane societies follow the same procedures for collecting fees and issuing licenses as those followed by current collecting officials. They must turn over all fees collected and a copy of each license sold to the designated official in the municipality. However, collecting officials may keep 25 cents, or a larger amount if approved by the municipality, for each license issued as compensation for the service. Remember that if you sell licenses for more than one municipality, you may have to collect different fees and will need to send copies of licenses to the different municipalities where the animal owners live.

Veterinarians and humane societies that wish to participate should contact their local municipalities.

Idaho The Department of Health and Welfare reported that 10 employees in a small animal veterinary clinic became ill after one had cared for several kittens with diarrhea.



The 10 employees ate meals in the clinic and had no common exposures outside the clinic.

Washington The Department of Health detected an outbreak in which one clinic employee and two clients became ill. The clients' cats had developed diarrhea shortly after discharge from the clinic. The three had no other common exposure. *S. typhimurium* was isolated from 14 cats associated with the clinic; some had initially presented with diarrhea.

Minnesota The Department of Health found *S. typhimurium* isolates from nine kittens that died in an animal shelter and six people who either bought cats from the shelter or attended the same day-care center as an ill child whose family owned a cat from the shelter.

It is unknown how the human patients in these outbreaks became infected, but it may have resulted from suboptimal sanitation and hygienic practices. Many cats in the three facilities had a diarrheal illness that may have contributed to Salmonella transmission. Fecal shedding can last several months after recovery from an acute episode of Salmonella gastroenteritis. MMWR suggested that use of antimicrobial agents in the clinics and shelter may have lowered the infectious dose of multidrug-resistant Salmonella needed to cause illness in animals, increasing the likelihood of transmission to humans.

MMWR reminded workers in veterinary clinics to:

- Wash their hands after handling pets.
- Wear rubber or disposable gloves, removing them and washing their hands after finishing a task that involves contact with animal feces.
- Take measures to reduce splashes of feces to the mouth when hosing or cleaning a kennel.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces contaminated with feces.

In addition, clinic directors should not allow eating in animal treatment or holding areas, and should avoid inappropriate use of antimicrobial agents.

CVI's online in the Sunshine State

Florida's new electronic certificates of veterinary inspection could be a glimpse of the future in Wisconsin. State Veterinarian Clarence Siroky, DVM, would like to launch a similar system here within the next couple of years.

Florida's Division of Animal Industry joined with GlobalVetLink of Ames, Iowa, to develop a web-based system that went online in September to issue and track certificates of veterinary inspection. Using a log-on ID and a password, veterinarians can enter data and print out a CVI for livestock movements. The health certificate will automatically and immediately be sent electronically to both the Florida state veterinarian and the state veterinarian in the receiving state, both of whom will also be able to access the information via password.

Equine infectious anemia forms are also available online, with ability to connect to laboratory data.

Another service is cost-efficient data storage, making full histories of animal movements readily available and backtracking simpler. Issuing veterinarians can easily generate reports of their health certificate activity.

And there are links to animal health web sites and regulations in all 50 states, saving a lot of phone calls and time spent on hold.

The advantages the system offers make it an attractive option for Wisconsin, Siroky says. Among those advantages:

- Veterinarians can get CVIs 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The web-based system means no one using the system need buy any new software or hardware.
- Veterinarians would no longer need to maintain paper files of health certificates.
- Forging or altering certificates will be much more difficult than with the old system of multi-copy paper documents.
- Veterinarians save money on phone bills, postage, file storage and equipment and personnel time.
- There will be no more late night calls for verification, because inspectors can pull up the data if they find discrepancies between actual animals and those listed in the documentation.

Stay tuned for developments in Wisconsin.

Who's My Owner? Pet Bird Identification

By Ellen Hooker, DVM

District Veterinarian, Division of Animal Health, and Bird Lover

A budgie named Tweetie, a macaw named Paco. Owners know their feathered friends, but to anyone else they all look alike. And if birds get lost, stolen, or involved in a custody battle, permanent identification may help.

There are several ways to identify pet birds permanently – and no, official metal eartags are *not* among them.

Leg bands are the most common method, using a series of unique numbers that can indicate the banding facility and the banding year. Closed bands go over baby birds' feet, and the birds grow into them. Bands for budgies must be a lightweight metal, such as aluminum. Bands for larger parrots are typically made of steel. Adult birds may be tagged with open bands, using a metal crimping tool. Open bands are removable, so they do not offer permanent ID.

Bands have two drawbacks. First, a bird may injure itself if the band catches on anything. Second, flaking keratin scales can build up under the band, causing constriction and necrosis of the leg. The bird's leg may actually fall off as you remove the band.

I recommend that veterinarians get permission to remove leg bands when pet birds are presented. Give the owner the band, and record the number and removal date in the

bird's permanent record. Band removal can be dangerous. You must protect the leg from trauma and heat. Specialty band cutters, construction-grade bolt cutters, and variable-speed hobby tools with a fine-tip cutting bit are all used.

DNA fingerprinting is available at several laboratories, and is usually done along with DNA sexing. While this technique is state of the art, it requires an initial, invasive blood sample and another later if needed to prove ownership.

Microchipping is the most reliable method. A rice-size chip, readable by transponder, is injected into the pectoral muscle. Properly implanted, the chip is invisible. There are some limitations. Not all scanners can read all chips, and not all veterinarians, shelters, and animal control agencies own scanners. Birds <35 grams cannot be chipped.

Tattooing is not a good method of bird identification, because the marking becomes illegible on bird skin.

Encourage clients to take close-up photos of their birds. Minor variations like beak defects or toe deviations may prove useful if the owner needs to describe the bird.

Our role is to ensure that the identification methods we use on our feathered patients are safe and permanent. For more detailed information, contact me at 715-256-0068.