Position Statement
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Position Statement on the Use of Point-of-Care Rapid Antigen Tests for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

Many wildlife rehabilitators have asked about the use of rapid antigen tests (i.e., immunochromatographic assay tests) to screen for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) given the surge in positive cases of HPAI found in wild birds.

While this could be a useful screening tool, there are limitations to these tests. Unfortunately, these tests are not designed for use with the species we treat in wildlife rehabilitation and, when a test is used to test animals for which it is not designed, results are often unreliable.

In the case of HPAI tests, false positive or false negative test results could lead to potentially dangerous outcomes for animals in care. A false positive result means that the animal tests positive when they are in fact negative for HPAI. If a false positive test is obtained, the facility should be quarantined until PCR results confirm or refute the antigen test. A false negative result means that the animal tests negative when in fact it is positive for HPAI. If the bird is admitted to the wildlife rehabilitation center it may be asymptomatic, yet still shedding the virus, potentially exposing other birds.

Test results from these tests are **not reliable** and could result in the euthanasia of animals wrongly thought to have the disease, or could result in euthanasia of extra animals later after inadvertent exposure to a positive animal incorrectly identified as negative.

Therefore, caution should be used when administering these antigen tests to screen patients.

Our best defense against HPAI at this time is following proper biosecurity protocols, including quarantine of animals and use of appropriate PPE by caregivers. We encourage each rehabilitation center to develop protocols that address biosecurity practices in your center.

Biosecurity protocols should include:

1. Appropriate quarantine procedures for incoming birds
2. Appropriate PPE (e.g., separate goggles, disposable gloves, mask, and footwear for each room)
3. Appropriate cleaning and disinfecting procedures:
    a. Remove all organic matter. Clean with warm soapy water. Rinse.
    b. Apply disinfectant according to the label instructions (5% sodium hypochlorite (bleach); quaternary ammonium compounds; aldehydes; accelerated hydrogen peroxides) and let sit for the instructed time. Contact time and ambient temperature are important to ensure the virus has been killed.
    c. Rinse well.
    d. Dry completely before allowing birds back into the room. Remember that the respiratory system of birds is very sensitive to chemicals, so rinsing and drying are important steps.

In conclusion, if rehabilitators do choose to use antigen tests to screen for HPAI, caution should be taken for false negative or positive results. It is imperative that all wildlife rehabilitators adhere to strict biosecurity protocols and local, state/provincial, and federal mandates. More information on protecting captive wild birds can be found at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_welfare/ac-tech-note-captive-wild-bird-biosecurity-508.pdf.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5938181/

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/emergency_management/downloads/sop/sop_cd.pdf
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5938181/

https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/h7n9/specimen-collection.htm

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_welfare/ac-tech-note-captive-wild-bird-biosecurity-508.pdf