



# Boongarry Veterinary Surgery

Birds, Reptiles, Fish, Zoo, Unusual & Exotic Pets and Wildlife

ABN: 96 039 437 142

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## Information Sheet

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### MAREK'S DISEASE

#### **What is Marek's Disease?**

Marek's disease is a strain of herpesvirus that affects the nervous system and can cause organ tumours and death of poultry (most commonly, chickens). Marek's disease is highly contagious and is transmissible through exposure to feathers, dander and body secretions, including droppings.

#### **Signs and Symptoms**

Chickens with Marek's Disease may show one or multiple of the following signs and symptoms:

- Paralysis of the legs and/or wings
- Impaired vision or blindness (including grey iris or irregular pupil)
- Depression and lethargy including pale droopy comb
- Irregularity around feather follicles – skin looks rough, raised or lump

#### **Treatment**

None.

Some birds may spontaneously recover from non-fatal symptoms with the appropriate management and supportive care. However, they may still shed virus and be a risk to other birds.

#### **Prevention**

Vaccination is currently the only prevention.

If vaccination is scheduled appropriately, it can significantly reduce the incidence of contracting and thus shedding Marek's disease. It is also recommended to quarantine any new birds for at least 3 weeks before introducing to the rest of your flock.



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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### ***What should I do if I think I have Marek's disease in my flock?***

Firstly, quarantine your flock and/or property. This means no birds in or out. Many people choose to eliminate birds from their flock, but contact your veterinarian to discuss further details relevant to your situation. Recovered birds may shed the virus and therefore be a source of infection for unvaccinated birds.

### ***Can you test for Marek's Disease?***

Yes you can. Your vet can take a blood or tissue sample and have it laboratory tested for a confirmed diagnosis. Also consider asking your vet about post mortem examinations for any suspicious deaths you may have in your flock.

### ***What is the incubation period?***

The incubation period can vary, however it generally takes 4-12 weeks for the disease to develop after the chicken has been exposed to the virus.

### ***When should I vaccinate my chickens and where can I get the vaccine?***

If breeding and hatching your own chickens, it is best to vaccinate day-old chick before placing in the brooder. When buying chickens, it recommended to buy vaccinated birds. Marek's vaccine is only commercially available in bulk. Contact your local avian vet for more information about vaccinating your chick or your flock.

### ***Is my family at risk of contracting herpesvirus if my chicken is diagnosed with Marek's Disease?***

No, this disease is not transmissible to humans.

### ***Are my turkeys and ducks at risk of contracting Marek's Disease?***

Turkeys can contract Marek's disease if kept and housed in very close proximity to chickens, however it is far less common. Quail have also been known to contract Marek's, although again

### ***Could my chickens be carrying the disease without looking sick?***

Yes, it is possible for some birds to carry and shed the disease, without showing symptoms themselves.

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