



## Blackhead (Histomoniasis, Enterohepatitis)

### Cause

A protozoan parasite, *Histomonas meleagridis*.

### Transmission

Direct transmission by infected water, feed, or droppings has been proved.

Indirect transmission by infected eggs of the caecal worm, *Heterakis gallinarum*, is also a major factor. Raising turkeys and chickens on wire and indoors decreases the incidence of blackhead.

### Species affected

Chickens, turkeys, and peafowl are natural hosts to blackhead infection.

### Clinical signs

Affected birds are depressed, stand or sit with ruffled feathers, and have yellowish diarrhoea. Darkening of head parts, especially in turkeys, gave the name to the disease (blackhead). Gross lesions include circular necrotic areas in livers with a crater-like center and cheesy cores in the caeca. Blackhead can cause high mortality, particularly in young turkey poults, but the disease can also affect older birds. In chickens the mortality from blackhead infection is usually lower, young chickens being the most susceptible.

### Treatment and control

Treatment with protozoan chemotherapeutics is usually effective. Such drugs can also be given at preventive levels in turkeys starter and grower feed. Growing turkeys on wire and indoors can reduce the incidence of blackhead to a large extent, but even so, strict hygiene and elimination of caecal worms are important control measures.