

## Popular Article

# Chicken Infectious Anaemia: An Emerging Threat to Poultry Industry

Syedah Asma Andrabi<sup>1</sup>, Abrar Ul Haq<sup>2</sup>, Amarjit Singh<sup>3</sup>, Nawab Nashiruddullah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Division of Veterinary Pathology, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, Sheri Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, Jammu, 181102

<sup>2</sup>Department of Veterinary Medicine, Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana, 141004, Punjab.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Veterinary Pathology, Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana, 141004, Punjab.

### *Abstract*

Chicken Infectious anaemia (CIA) is an economically important immunosuppressive disease of poultry birds with worldwide distribution. It is caused by Chicken anaemia virus (CAV) belonging to genus *Gyrovirus* and family *Circoviridae*. CAV causes severe anaemia, muscular haemorrhages, generalized lymphoid atrophy and immunosuppression in birds less than 3 weeks of age. In birds 6 weeks or older with compromised humoral immune response, the disease takes subclinical form. Yellow fatty bone marrow and thymic atrophy is the most consistent finding in CAV affected birds. Vertical transmission of CAV is more significant but horizontal transmission also occurs and chickens are the only natural host. The disease has no public health significance but recent studies have reported the isolation of the virus and closely related *Gyroviruses* from both healthy and diseased individuals, suggesting that CAV may be potential threat to the public. CIA can be tentatively diagnosed on the basis of clinical signs and gross lesions. However, confirmatory diagnosis can be made by various serological and molecular techniques. There is no specific treatment for the disease but proper disease control and management strategies, breeder vaccination program and measures can help in preventing the outbreaks of CIA.

**Keywords:** Chicken Infectious Anaemia, Immunosuppression, Gyrovirus, Poultry

## 1. Introduction

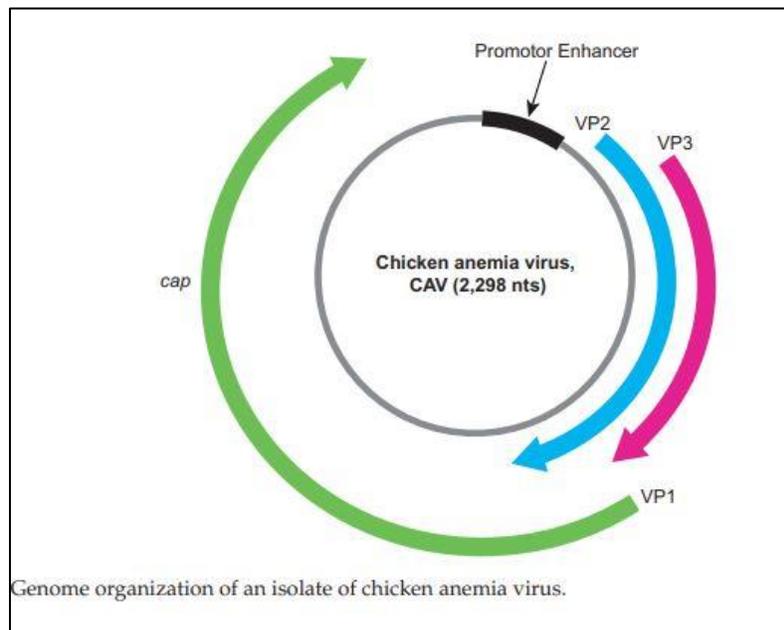
Livestock, including poultry, are the major capital assets and income generating sources of small-scale farmers. The poultry industry in India is the fastest growing components of global agricultural demands because it has a peculiar privilege to improve the living standards of the poor farmers as well as contribute to the sector. It was considered as a backyard venture before the 1960s but now it has transformed into a vibrant agribusiness with an annual turnover of Rs 30000 crores (Mehta and Nambiar, 2006). In spite of rapid growth in India, the poultry industry suffered many setbacks in recent times due to the lack of selection, low genetic potential, rising cost of feed, fluctuating market price of egg and broilers and emergence of new or reemergence of existing diseases, Poultry birds may get infected by various viral, fungal, bacterial, and parasitic diseases which suppresses their overall potential and may cause immunosuppression.

Immunosuppression has a great economic importance in the poultry industry, because affected flocks respond poorly to vaccines, and do not perform as good as non-affected birds. Many viral diseases result in immunosuppression which may be mild to severe depending upon the tissue tropism of virus. It has been known for many years that Infectious Bursal disease virus (IBDV), Chicken infectious Anaemia virus (CIAV), Marek's disease virus (MDV), and Reo virus infection produces direct effect on the immune system of birds. Indeed, combinations of two or more of these viruses can amplify the adverse effects.

Chicken infectious anaemia (CIA) is emerging as a new disease from last three decades which leads to production losses in both percentage of livability and percentage of condemnations (Hagood *et al.*, 2000). CIAV is a potent immunosuppressive agent that leads to generalized lymphoid atrophy and transient severe anaemia due to destruction of erythroblastoid cells in bone marrow and immunodeficiency due to depletion of cortical thymocytes resulting in enhanced concurrent infections and vaccination failures. The immunosuppressive effects of CIA on broilers are economically significant and birds may not perform well due to poor feed conversion and reduced weight gain throughout the growing period which may result in increased condemnation rates at slaughter (Mercks Animal Health). The disease usually affects young birds and causes peak mortality within 5-6 days of onset of the acute form of disease which declines after a further 5-6 days (Engstrom and Luthman, 1984, Yuasa *et al.*, 1979)

## 2. Virus (CIAV)

Chicken infectious anaemia (CIA) is caused by the smallest avian virus with size ranging from 23-25 nm belonging to the genus *Gyrovirus* of family *Circoviridae* (Pringle, 1999; Todd *et al.*, 2007, Zhang *et al.*, 2013). The virions are non-enveloped with icosahedral symmetry and a capsid consisting of 60 subunits arranged in 12 pentameric rings. The virus replicates through rolling circle model. The genome organization is negative sense, circular ss-DNA of 1.7 to 2.3 kb having three partially overlapping major open reading frames (ORFs) which encodes for VP1, VP2 and VP3 proteins (Fig 1) (Miller *et al.*, 2005, Natesan *et al.*, 2006) VP1 acts as a major capsid protein, VP2 as a scaffold protein essential for virus assembly. Both VP1 and VP2 proteins are required to induce protective immunity, the absence of either of VP1 or VP2 fails to induce neutralizing antibodies (Koch *et al.*, 1995). A single amino acid at position 394 in VP1 gene is the major genetic determinant of virulence. Presence of histidine instead of glutamine at this position makes the virus less pathogenic (Yamaguchi *et al.*, 2001, Andrabi *et al.*, 2021). VP3 (apoptin) causes apoptosis in chicken thymocytes and chicken lymphoblastoid cell lines (Miller *et al.*, 2005).



**Fig 1: Chicken infectious anemia virus**

## 3. Epidemiology and public health significance

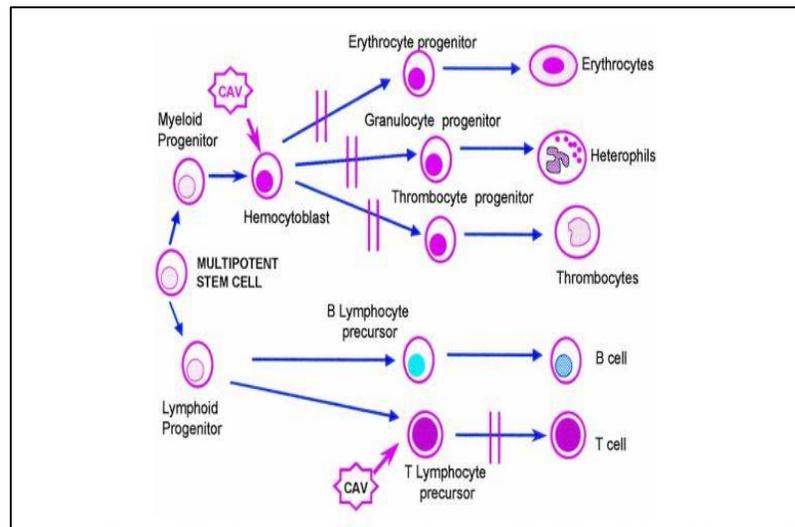
CIA has complex epidemiology as development of clinical disease following infection is dependent on a number of factors that include age of the bird, challenge dose of virus, route of infection, secondary invasion and presence of maternal antibodies (McNulty, 1991, Dhama, 2002; 1122

Schat, 2003a). Another important epidemiological key factor is co-infection with other immunosuppressive viruses such as Marek's disease virus (MDV), Infectious Bursal disease virus (IBDV), Avian Reovirus (ARV) and Adenovirus (Dhama, 2002; Schat, 2003b). CIA has worldwide distribution and has been discovered in almost all poultry producing countries. (Ducatez *et al.*, 2008; AboElkhair *et al.*, 2014). The disease was first reported in Japan as a new disease in young commercial chicken during investigation of Marek's disease (Yuasa *et al.*, 1979). In India CIA was first reported in chickens in Tamil Nadu (Venugopalan *et al.*, 1994). The field outbreaks of CIA were reported from Gujrat and Andhra Pradesh (Praveen *et al.*, 2008). A very high serological incidence was reported in commercial poultry farms of northern region in India (Bhatt *et al.*, 2011). Outbreaks of CIA were reported from 2010 to 2016 from Haryana (Brar *et al.*, 2019). CIAV outbreaks were reported in young poultry flocks from the Nagpur province of India, between the years 2012–2015 and from Central India as well (Ganar *et al.*, 2017; Kamdi *et al.*, 2017). CIAV was detected in young commercial poultry flocks from twelve different states of the country including Punjab and adjoining areas (Wani *et al.*, 2013, Gowthaman *et al.*, 2014; Andrabi *et al.*, 2018; Sreekala *et al.*, 2020). Sero-prevalence of the disease has been found in different states including Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Telangana. (Baksi *et al.*, 2016). Recently outbreaks of CIA have been reported from Karnataka and South India (Chandrashekaraiah *et al.*, 2020; Rao *et al.*, 2022).

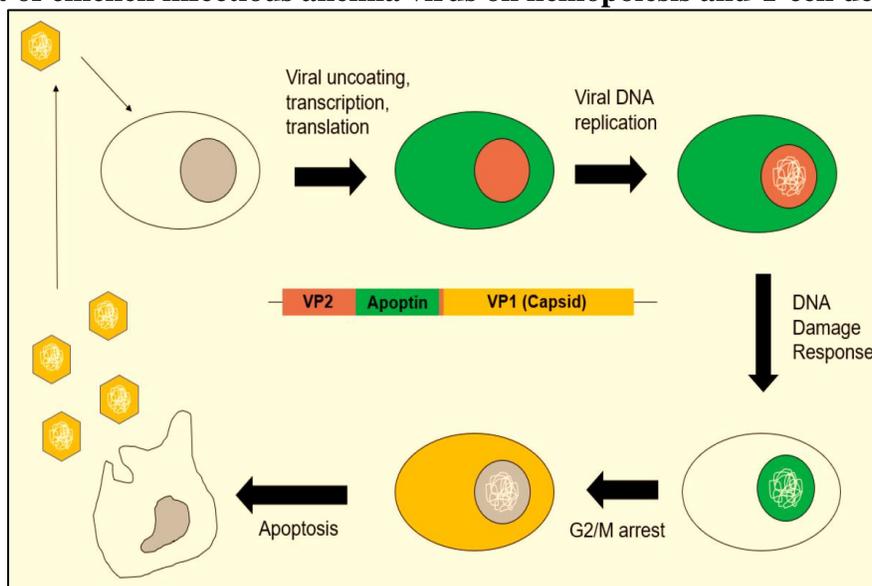
#### **4. Transmission and pathogenesis**

CIA has been reported to be transmitted by both vertical and horizontal route (McNulty 1991; Zhang *et al.*, 2013). Vertical route is important when adult birds become infected because virions can be transferred through embryo during viraemic period prior to the development of neutralizing antibodies. Chickens hatching from such eggs develop anaemia, immunosuppression and secondary bacterial infections. These chicks act as a source of infection during horizontal transmission probably through faeces until neutralizing antibodies develop (Schat 2003a). Chicken infectious anaemia virus (CIAV) enters target cells (Erythroid and lymphoid progenitor cells) by adsorption and penetration, and multiplies in the nucleus by a rolling circle model. The virus causes aplastic anaemia in young chickens by destruction of erythroblastoid cells, and severe depletion of thymocytes leading to thymus atrophy and immunodeficiency (Adair, 2000; Noteborn and Koch 2007) (Fig 2). CIAV has specific tropism for lymphocytes leading to lymphocyte depletion. Virus mainly attacks thymic lymphoblasts (CD4+, CD8+ T- cells) and hemocytoblasts (Balamurugan and Kataria, 2006). Virus replicates primarily in haematopoietic precursor cells in bone marrow

and thymic precursor cells in the cortex of thymus where it leads to cytolytic infection (Balamurugan and Kataria, 2006; Rosenberger and Cloud, 1998; Smyth *et al.*, 1993) and cell death by the mechanism of apoptosis which is triggered by the VP3 protein (Noteborn and Koch, 2007). Later on convalescent stage coincides with antibody development and birds usually recover from depression and anaemia within 4-6 weeks. Body weight gradually returns to the normal but chickens remain stunted. Co-infection with other immunosuppressive viruses such as Marek's disease virus, Infectious Bursal disease virus, Avian Reovirus and Adenovirus leads to marked immunosuppression (Dhama, 2002; Todd, 2000). Chicken anemia virus life cycle is illustrated in (Figure 3).



**Fig 2: Effect of chicken infectious anemia virus on hemopoiesis and T cell development**



**Fig 3: Schematic diagram showing the proposed model of the CAV life cycle**  
 ( Source: Feng *et al.*, 2020; doi: [10.3390/pathogens9040294](https://doi.org/10.3390/pathogens9040294); Journal Pathogens)

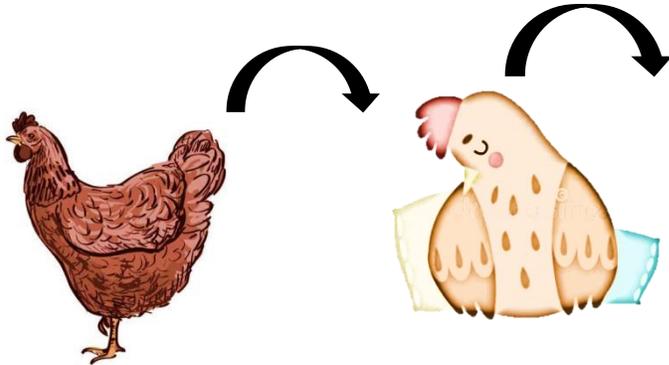
## 5. Clinical signs and pathological findings

Under field conditions CIAV infected birds show fewer signs of the disease but co-infection with other infectious agents is more serious. Concurrent infection of CIAV with Avian Reovirus (ARV) causes blue wing disease (BWD), Fowl Adenovirus (FAV) causes aplastic anaemia syndrome, Infectious bursal disease virus (IBDV) causes haemorrhagic anemia syndrome, and with *Clostridium perfringens* and *Staphylococcus aureus* causes gangrenous dermatitis (McNulty 1991, Pope 1991, Dhama *et al.*, 2002; Schat, 2003b)

The first signs of the disease appear when the young infected birds are between 7 and 14 days of age (Todd, 2000). Clinically, the disease is characterized by lethargy, ruffled feathers and gangrenous dermatitis under the skin, pale mucous membranes and cutaneous, subcutaneous, and intramuscular hemorrhages (Fig 4, 5, and 6) (Ganar *et al.*, 2017; Adedeji *et al.*, 2016). Peak mortality occurs within 5-6 days of onset of acute form of disease which declines after a further 5-6 days (Engstrom and Luthman, 1984; Yuasa *et al.*, 1979). Birds show mortality upto 55% and morbidity upto 80% (AboElkhair *et al.*, 2014). Anaemia is a characteristic with decreased hematocrit values and marked thrombocytopenia in birds as young as 2-4 weeks of age (Kamdi *et al.*, 2016).

Although CIAV has tropism for lymphoid organs and noticeable lesions can be found in thymus, bursa, spleen, caecal tonsils and bone marrow (McNulty, 1991), however, lesions can be found in other visceral organs as well (Todd *et al.*, 2001) but these lesions may be largely associated with secondary infections (Miller and Schat, 2004). Most common findings in CIAV infected birds include pale and fatty marrow of femur bone and atrophy of the haematopoietic elements of the bone marrow with marked depletion of erythropoietic and granulopoietic tissue. In much severe cases replacement of haemopoietic cells by lipocytes has been reported (Dhama *et al.*, 2002). Depletion of lymphocytes from both cortex and medulla of thymus with indistinct cortical-medullary interface can be manifested in CIAV infected birds (Toro *et al.*, 1997; Andrabi *et al.*, 2018). There has been report of moderate to severe lymphoid depletion along with focal necrosis and apoptosis in spleen of CIAV infected birds. Bursa showed mild necrosis of bursal follicles along with lymphoid depletion and proliferation of reticular cells (Kamdi *et al.*, 2015). Swollen and mottled liver and spleen with nephrosis in kidneys and highly pale and icteric carcass has been reported in CIA outbreaks (Balamurugan and Kataria, 2006; Gowthaman *et al.*, 2014). Sometimes eosinophilic intranuclear inclusion bodies (EINIB) can be observed in cortical cells of thymus and in bone marrow of infected birds (Goryo *et al.*, 1989). However, occasional presence

of intranuclear inclusion bodies in the spleen, proventriculus, lung, kidney, bursa of Fabricius and skin have also been reported (Smyth *et al.*, 1993).



**Fig 4: Ruffled feather**

**Fig 5: Lethargy**



**Fig 6: Gangrenous dermatitis**  
*Photo courtesy of Dr. Collett.*

## 6. Diagnosis

Diagnosis of CIA can be made based on clinical signs and pathological lesions in affected birds but this alone is not sufficient to diagnose the condition (Goodwin and Brown, 1992). Various techniques have been described to diagnose CIA. Isolation of the virus in cell culture and embryonated eggs is considered as a gold standard for detection of CIAV but the method is relatively tedious, cumbersome and expensive (Yuasa *et al.*, 1979; McNulty *et al.*, 1989). Other diagnostic techniques like immunohistochemistry, Immunofluorescence and ELISA have also been used but these techniques are usually time consuming and require extensive sample processing. PCR based detection of CIAV is widely used technique because it is relatively inexpensive and fast with high specificity and sensitivity (Saini and Dandapat, 2009). Recently, real-time quantitative PCR-based serum neutralization has been developed for the detection and quantification of CIAV genomes (Van Santen *et al.*, 2004).

## 7. Prevention and Control

CIAV acts synergistically with other infectious agents under field conditions and produces detrimental effects on affected birds. So, the disease is incurable and eradication is unachievable. However, maintaining clean sanitary environment with proper immunization against other bacterial and viral diseases will surely reduce the severity and occurrence of the disease. Genetic selection should be practiced in the field so as to increase the disease resistance of the flocks (Hoerr, 2010). Vertical transmission of the virus can be prevented by the use of vaccine that will

provide acquired immunity to the birds. Various vaccines have been developed against CIAV which include Chicken embryo-propagated Cux-1 isolate live vaccine (104.5TCID<sub>50</sub>/bird), Cell culture-propagated CAV in drinking water, an effective recombinant subunit vaccine (VP1 and VP2 proteins of CAV) using a baculovirus insect cell culture system (Vielitz *et al.*, 1987, Von Bulow and Schat, 1997, Koch *et al.*, 1995) but the immunization of birds in India against CIAV is still in its infancy. It is advised to vaccinate the birds at about 13–15 weeks of age, 3–4 weeks prior to the onset of lay to avoid the hazard of spreading vaccine virus through eggs (Vielitz *et al.*, 1987; McNulty, 1991). Recently, it has been documented that a single amino acid change at residue 394 of VP1, a major determinant of pathogenicity, can generate a low-pathogenicity CAV (Yamaguchi *et al.*, 2001, Andrabi *et al.*, 2020). So, these approaches could be good candidates for development of stable, cost effective and safe CAV vaccines, which may be of great help in controlling the disease.

## 8. Conclusion

CIAV is a potent immunosuppressive agent which along with other infectious agents like Marek's disease virus, Infectious Bursal disease virus, Reovirus, Inclusion body hepatitis virus causes havoc to the poultry industry thus leading to grievous economic losses throughout the world. It leads to chronic debilitation, severe aplastic anaemia, bone marrow suppression, atrophy of lymphoid organs in general and thymic atrophy in particular. Molecular detection of the virus using PCR is highly effective in diagnosing the disease. CIAV is incurable and hence complete eradication is impossible. However, by following the proper biosecurity measures, immunization protocols and management practices, the disease can be well managed. Proper epidemiological surveys need to be conducted to know the strain of the virus circulating in the field so that proper disease control measures and management strategies could be taken accordingly and losses due to subclinical infections could be turned down.

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