The Facts About Disease and Pigeons...

Introduction:
Pigeons have been closely associated with mankind for many millennia, and are very well adapted for this association; both have obviously benefited greatly. Pigeon physiology is so different from that of humans and other mammals, that they share very few diseases in common. However, a few of these concerns are listed below.

Pigeons are not susceptible to most diseases as their metabolism is rapid and their body temperature exceeds 107 degrees. Therefore, they cannot host many viruses or transmit to other animals.

Avian Influenza

The strains of Chlamydia that pigeons can host generally do not cause disease in humans. There are two reasons for this: the pigeon strains are not pathogenic to humans; pigeons are extremely poor transmitters of Chlamydia to other animals. These findings are consistent across several laboratories, and have been well maintained pigeons. The American Racing Pigeon Union has developed basic biosecurity protocols, which were reviewed and approved by the USDA.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, not carrier birds do not carry the disease and are not infectious. Infants, young children, and other persons with chronic lung disease may be at increased risk for severe disease. Disseminated disease is more frequently seen in people with cancer, AIDS or other forms of immunosuppression.

Blastomycosis, Histoplasmosis (the dimorphic fungi)

These fungi grow in nitrogen rich decaying organic matter, and have been associated with some species of wild pigeons. Pigeon fanciers, whether healthy or not, should avoid handling infected pigeons, and should follow proper biosecurity protocols.

Pneumonia

The strains of Pneumocystis which do infect pigeons specifically; it is endemic in the US and other regions, often in association with domestic pigeons. Pigeons with pneumonia are usually asymptomatic, and are not transmissible to humans.

Newcastle Disease

Newcastle Disease is caused by a Paramyxovirus, and can be a threat to the poultry industry. There are two general categories of Newcastle Disease: Exotic Newcastle, which is highly pathogenic, and the less pathogenic Newcastle. Highly pathogenic Exotic Newcastle can cause disease in unvaccinated pigeons. The less pathogenic strains of Newcastle are generally not hosted well by pigeons. Pigeons vaccinated with Newcastle vaccine generally do not cause disease in humans.

Ornithosis (Chlamydia)

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Paramyxovirus

There are strains of Paramyxovirus which do infect pigeons specifically. However, they are not likely to be transmitted to humans or other animals.

Salmonella

This bacteria is extremely variable, and has a wide host range which includes birds. By adhering to the standards of human and avian hygiene currently practiced in the US, it is extremely unlikely for Salmonella to infect pigeons. Moreover, the strains that infect pigeons can be easily treated with antibiotics in the unlikely event of infection.
The AU’s biosecurity protocols were reviewed and approved by the USDA. Below are some of the basic protocols from the AU’s recommended biosecurity protocols.

Basic sanitation practices for handling pigeons include:

1) Wash your hands before and after handling pigeons or pigeon equipment.

2) After visiting a pigeon loft or pigeon event, change and launder your clothes. Or wear coveralls to visit a loft or show, and launder them afterwards.

3) Pigeons are ideal for introducing children to the animal world; however such encounters should be closely supervised by their parents.

From the **AU Scientific Advisory Taskforce**

(A committee of the American Racing Pigeon Union, Inc. Commissioned January 2004)

**Veterinary Position Statement Regarding the Health Aspects of Pigeon Keeping**

Approved as a resolution of the American Racing Pigeon Union on July 18, 2004

“In consideration of data from the United States Communicable Disease Center and of research conducted pertaining to registered, pedigree Homing Pigeons, we affirm that to our knowledge, the above Statement is true.

Paul Miller, DVM (PA)
Roger Harlin, DVM (OK)
Robert Lynch, Ph.D. (GA)
Jim Vanderheid, DDS (CA)
James Higgins, DVM (PA)
Warren Shetrone, DVM (HI)
John Kazmierczak, DVM (NJ)

Pigeons are extremely easy to keep, with very simple nutritional and husbandry requirements. They can comfortably tolerate a wide variety of environmental conditions, and adapt very readily and comfortably to a wide variety of avicultural situations and uses. Although relatively rare, the few diseases pigeons do get are easily treated with readily available medications or prevented with vaccines. Within the field of Veterinary Medicine, there is a specialty of Avian Medicine to support pigeon fanciers in keeping their birds healthy and comfortable.”

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Pigeons and Avian Related Diseases

(Not what you may think!)

An AU Research Update

There are many misperceptions about the registered Homing Pigeon. Learn the facts, pigeons are an amazing part of our history and not associated with most diseases.

Having correct information is important. Get the facts!

The keeping and recreational use of pigeons, under currently accepted standards of pigeon husbandry and hygiene, is a safe activity, and poses no particular hazards to public health or safety or to the personal health or hygiene of pigeon caretakers beyond the risk posed by the keeping of any other animal. There are no zoonotic diseases specific to pigeons. For a healthy, immune-competent person, pigeon keeping in accord with current avicultural standards is a very safe activity.

Pigeons are ideal for introducing children to the animal world; however such encounters should be closely supervised by their parents.

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