

COMMON FUNGAL DISEASES OF WINTER WHEAT IN THE CONDITIONS OF UZBEKISTAN

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: March 28 th 2021	
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Keywords: Winter wheat, root and foot rot, whitehead, *Fusarium* spp., *Bipolaris sorokiniana*, *Microdochium bolleyi*, *Heterodera avenae*.

Winter bread wheat *Triticum aestivum* L. grown on irrigated areas may be considered as a relatively new crop for Uzbekistan because at Soviet times it has been considered as unimportant and had been cultivated exclusively on unirrigated (boghara) drylands, mostly foothills, on limited areas (100 to 250 thousand ha annually). Currently wheat occupies more than 1.4 million ha of irrigated arable lands annually. Unfortunately, crop growing system on these areas envisages dominance of wheat, and this creates favorable conditions for development not only of common diseases of this crop but leads or to appearance of new ones either to increasing frequency and severity of diseases that before were of little significance.

One group of such diseases are seedling blight, root, crown and foot rots of wheat and other cereal crops. Their symptoms include at first appearing of light brown, later becoming dark brown to black spots (necroses) on nodal and seminal roots, crowns, subcrown internodes, lower stem and lower leaf sheets. Infected plants have yellowing leaves and are stunted. At tillering stage one or more shoots can be killed. At heading stage some shoots can be stunted and fail to form ears, or may develop small heads with few or no seeds. Severe infection with aggressive pathogens (e.g., some *Fusarium* spp.) at booting-heading-early ripening stages can cause premature death of plants with spikes, producing symptoms called "white shoot" and "whitehead".

Symptoms of root, crown and foot rots may vary depending on causal fungi. Aetiology of the disease is complicated and it can be incited by dozens of pathogenic fungi (Table 1), or unfavorable weather and soil conditions. Different species of fungi may be involved and dominate in development of infectious root, crown and foot rots of wheat in various countries. The most devastating diseases are take-all, Fusarium diseases, common root rot, in some countries or regions – eyespot, *Pythium* root rots, *Rhizoctonia* root rots, snow molds and rots, and brown root rot. Much less important are root diseases caused by weak pathogens such as chytrids, *Microdochium bolleyi*, *Curvularia* spp., *Hendersonia* sp. a.o. (Hill et al., 1983; Bockus et al., 2010; Nicol et al., 2010) [1-3].

Root, crown and foot rot diseases of wheat are little studied in Uzbekistan. The purpose of the current work was to determine occurrence of these diseases on wheat fields in central, southern regions and Fergana Valley of our country and to identify their causal agents.

Samples of seedlings and mature plants of wheat infected with root rots have been collected during visits to farms (on a commission from the State Plant Protection Centre); some diseased plant samples had been delivered to us by farmers and scientists of the Uzbek Plant Protection Institute in 2011, 2012, 2015, 2016, and 2019. Route surveys of wheat fields for diseases have been carried out in Andijan and (partly) Fergana regions in 2019. Incidence of root rot disease symptoms including yellowing, stunting, and whitehead, has been determined and samples of infected plants were collected.

Samples were delivered to the lab of the Institute of Genetics and Plant Experimental Biology (IGPEB), and symptoms on roots and lower stems were recorded. Identification of causal agents of the diseases have been done in accordance with methods described earlier (Khasanov, 1990) [1]. Fragments 5-7 mm long had been cut off aseptically with sterile scissors from samples, and washed under tap water during c. 2 hours, surface sterilized with 0.5% solution of sodium hypochlorite during 30 s, rinsed twice in sterile distilled water with a droplet of Silwet Gold surfactant, and dried between sterile filter papers. Then fragments were placed on surface of sterile 2% water agar or other medium in plastic Petri dishes (Ø 9 mm), 4-6 fragments per a dish. To suppress bacterial growth after cooling till ~50°C all media were added with streptomycin sulphate and penicillin (0.5 g/L + 0.5 g/L). Media in the second set of Petri dishes were not added with antibiotics for revealing bacterial growth if any. Inoculated Petri dishes were incubated during 7±3 days in growth chamber at alternating day-night conditions (4-5 Klx, 12 hours, 22±2°C day and 12 hours, 15 to 20°C night). Illumination had been provided with four L40 W/77 Fluora NUV lamps with a peak 365 nm and four fluorescent daylight lamps. Fungi that have appeared on fragments had been studied first directly (*in situ*) under microscope at low magnification (80-120X), then mounts with fungal reproductive organs were studied at higher magnification (320-400X). Conidiophores, conidia and other structures found were measured and registered and their characters were used for identification of pathogenic and accompanying fungi to species or generic level using special identification books (Nelson et al., 1983; Sivanesan, 1987; Leslie, Summerell, 2006; Bockus et al., 2010; Nicol et al., 2010) [2-4, 6,7]. Some of these fragments were used for isolation of pure cultures of representative causal fungi. Morphology of fungi were studied on potato dextrose agar medium in Petri dishes. Slope cultures of representative isolates are stored at the collection of the IGPEB.

Samples of infected plants were collected from 33 fields of 16 districts, six regions of the country. Symptoms observed were yellowing leaves, stunting, discoloration of roots and crowns, lower stems, death of tillers, and whitehead.

Incidence of the disease varied in different fields, regions and by years. On some fields at tillering (TP, 11-1; AI, A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4; BS, B-1) and booting (KH, 12-1,2,3; BJ, B-2) growth stages incidence of the disease was enough high and it has been distributed in fields more or less evenly; adverse effect of the disease in such fields consisted mainly in death of tillers, often the main shoots of the plants.

Even distribution of stunting plants and yellowing leaves has been observed also on fields with highly saline soils (AU, 13). At later growth stages (heading-flowering and further) diseased plants were registered, as a rule, in small foci, or more often, sparsely. This has been true especially for whitehead, which has been observed sporadically, with incidence from less than 0.1% to 1-2% .

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