

Psittacosis

What is Psittacosis?

Psittacosis (also known as parrot fever, ornithosis, or chlamydiosis) is a mild flu-like infection caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia psittaci*. Psittacosis is a rare infection, causing less than 50 infections in the United States per year. Most people develop psittacosis after inhaling droppings from infected birds. People most at risk for infection are bird owners, pet shop employees, veterinarians, and those working at poultry processing plants. Although all birds are at risk for infection, pet birds (parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatiels) and poultry (turkeys and ducks) are most frequently involved in transmission to humans.

How is Psittacosis transmitted?

Inhaling dried secretions from infected birds may lead to psittacosis. Infected birds excrete the bacteria in their feces and nasal discharges; the bacteria can remain active for several months. Person-to-person infection is rare.

What are the symptoms of Psittacosis?

Common symptoms include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a dry cough. More serious health outcomes may develop in immunocompromised individuals, such as endocarditis, hepatitis, and neurological complications.

What are the symptoms in animals?

Infected birds are often asymptomatic but some may show signs of sleepiness, shivering, weight loss, breathing difficulties, and diarrhea. The time between exposure to the bacterium and disease symptoms may range from three days to several weeks.

How is Psittacosis diagnosed?

Psittacosis is difficult to diagnose. Some tests, which are helpful in diagnosing psittacosis, involve culturing *Chlamydia psittaci* from the blood or sputum, a blood test, and a chest X-ray. Many people are diagnosed by their symptoms accompanied by a history of bird interaction.

How is Psittacosis treated?

Antibiotic therapy is usually successful in treating a psittacosis infection in both humans and birds. Birds can be given medication by oral administration, injection, as medicated pellets, or mixed in soft foods. During treatment, it is important that the bird owner isolate the infected bird from other birds, be cautious in handling bird droppings, keep the cage clean of feathers and dust, and reduce stress in the bird's environment.

Can Psittacosis be prevented?

To control and prevent psittacosis, birds should be fed properly and their cages kept clean. Overcrowding should be avoided and adequate ventilation should be provided.

All people involved with the care of infected birds should wear protective equipment, including face masks and gloves, and should avoid sweeping dry materials associated with the birds. Waste should be removed from animal facilities after moistening in order to lower the chance of inhaling infected materials in the form of dust.

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician or veterinarian for specific information related to you or your animals.

If you have comments or questions about this fact sheet, email cahfs@umn.edu Updated: 7/1/05

For more information go to:

- **Centers for Disease Control**
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/psittacosis_t.htm
- **Minnesota Department of Health**
www.health.state.mn.us