

PSITTACOSIS (PARROT FEVER, CHLAMYDIOSIS, CHLAMYDOPHILOSIS, ORNITHOSIS)

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Chlamydophila psittaci* (formerly known as *Chlamydia psittaci*) that humans get from birds. The bacteria are most common in birds of the parrot family (parrots, cockatoos, cockatiels, budgerigars), but turkeys, chickens, pigeons, and other birds can also be infected.

Birds infected with the bacteria often have poor appetite, weight loss, ruffled feathers, discharge from the eyes or nose, and diarrhea. It is also possible for infected birds to show no signs of illness, but still shed the bacteria.

How is psittacosis spread from birds to people?

People can become infected when they handle infected birds or breathe in the dust from dried bird droppings. Psittacosis most commonly affects persons who work in pet stores, aviaries, poultry farms and slaughterhouses, and other places where contact with bird feces and dander is common.

Person-to-person spread has not been reported. Areas contaminated with bird droppings can remain infectious for weeks.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis in people?

The symptoms of psittacosis usually begin 4 to 15 days after exposure and include fever, headache, chills, cough, and sometimes pneumonia. Pregnant women and the elderly may experience more severe illness.

How is psittacosis diagnosed?

Psittacosis is diagnosed in people by testing blood or respiratory secretions. In birds, the infection can be diagnosed by testing blood or swabs from the bird's mouth or cloaca (the opening beneath the tail for the digestive, reproductive, and urinary tracts).

How is psittacosis treated?

Psittacosis is treated with antibiotics.

How can I prevent the spread of psittacosis?

If you have pet birds at home, their cages and the rooms they inhabit should be cleaned daily so that the droppings do not collect, dry out, and become airborne.

Reducing stress in birds by good husbandry also lessens the chances of the bacteria being shed. Newly acquired birds should be quarantined for 2-4 weeks prior to being allowed to interact with other birds. Birds that appear ill should be isolated and examined by a veterinarian.

If your bird has been diagnosed with a *Chlamydophila psittaci* infection, it should be treated by a licensed veterinarian and reported to the local health department.

Where can I get more information regarding psittacosis?

Additional information is available on the Psittacosis page of the CDPH website:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/discond/Pages/Psittacosis.aspx>

Updated January 2015