



Psittacosis Fact Sheet

What is Psittacosis?

Psittacosis is a disease caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci*, which can cause illness in both birds and humans. Psittacosis is most commonly identified in psittacine birds, such as parakeets, cockatiels, parrots, and macaws, but can also occur in poultry, pigeons, and waterfowl. Infected birds may not show any symptoms or they may exhibit lethargy, anorexia, ruffled feathers, greenish colored droppings or discharge from the eyes or nose. Psittacosis occurs worldwide. Since 1996, fewer than 50 confirmed cases were reported in the United States each year. Many more cases may occur that are not correctly diagnosed or reported.

Who gets Psittacosis?

Anyone can get psittacosis if they have exposure to infected birds or the environment where infected birds have been. Bird owners, pet shop employees, and veterinarians are at greater risk of getting psittacosis.

How is Psittacosis Spread?

People get psittacosis primarily by breathing the bacteria in dust from bird droppings or feathers. Birds tend to shed the bacteria under conditions of stress. For this reason, the disease is most often seen in birds that have been recently imported, housed in pet shops or boarded with other birds. Birds do not have to show symptoms of

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disease in order to spread the infection to other birds or their handlers.

What are the symptoms of Psittacosis in people?

The illness typically starts with an onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches and a dry cough. Psittacosis can sometimes develop into pneumonia. Although *C. psittaci* infection in humans is normally mild, it can be more severe for persons who are currently sick, elderly, or have a condition that suppresses their immune system.

How soon do symptoms appear?

If present, symptoms of psittacosis will appear 5 to 19 days after exposure. Some persons may not develop any symptoms.

What is the treatment for psittacosis?

Appropriate antibiotics are usually very effective. Oral tetracycline or doxycycline is generally prescribed for adults, and erythromycin for children and pregnant women.

Can a person get Psittacosis more than once?

Yes. One bout with psittacosis does not protect a person from getting it again.

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How can Psittacosis be prevented?

- Take all new birds to a qualified avian veterinarian immediately after purchase for psittacosis screening tests.
- Buy birds from reputable suppliers who screen for the presence of psittacosis.
- Isolate and quarantine all newly acquired birds for a period of at least six weeks.
- Practice preventive husbandry. Keep the cages and area clean. A cleaning solution of 2 1/2 tablespoons of household bleach to 1 gallon of water will kill the bacteria. Allow all cage surfaces, including perches and bowls to thoroughly dry before returning the bird to the clean cage.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

revised 07/2014

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