Psittacosis

What is psittacosis?
Psittacosis is a disease that is caused by *Chlamydophila psittaci* and associated with psittacine birds; however, the bacteria can also infect poultry and non-psittacine birds like doves and pigeons.

Who gets psittacosis?
Persons most likely to get psittacosis are those who handle infected household birds, usually psittacine birds like cockatiels and parakeets.

Where are the bacteria that cause psittacosis found?
The organisms are found in droppings, secretions and dust from feathers of infected birds. Some infected birds can appear healthy and shed the organism intermittently. Shedding can be made worse by stresses like relocation, shipping, crowding, and chilling.

How is psittacosis spread?
Transmission occurs when the bacteria are inhaled from dried bird droppings, secretions, or dust from feathers. Person to person transmission has been suggested, but not proven.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?
The most common symptoms in humans are a sudden onset of fever, headache, feeling of weakness, muscle aches, chills. These symptoms can present as a mild flu-like illness or the infection can progress to a more severe form, especially in older persons.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?
The symptoms generally appear about one to two weeks after exposure, but longer periods have been reported.

What is the treatment for psittacosis?
Antibiotics of the tetracycline group are administered for 10-14 days after temperature returns to normal. Other classes of antibiotics may be used when tetracyclines are contraindicated.
How can psittacosis be prevented?
Taking steps to decrease illness in birds and seeking prompt treatment for ill birds will help decrease the likelihood that a person will become ill with psittacosis. Stress can be decreased in birds by maintaining good nutrition, isolating newly acquired birds from all other birds for 30 days after introducing them into the home, and avoiding other stressors like unnecessary handling, chilling and overheating. Sick birds should be examined by a veterinarian early in the course of illness. Bird cages, food bowls and water bowls should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. The type of bacteria that causes psittacosis is susceptible to most disinfectants, detergents and heat. Waste from bird cages should be removed regularly and should be moistened with a disinfectant solution prior to removal to decrease the chance that cleaning will create a situation where the bacteria will be inhaled. Waste from bird cages should be double bagged for disposal in household trash. People should wash their hands after handling a pet bird and they should avoid kissing pet birds. Immune compromised and pregnant persons may want to avoid direct contact with birds.

How can I get more information about psittacosis?
1) If you have concerns about psittacosis, contact your healthcare provider.