

### **✘ What is psittacosis?**

Psittacosis is a disease that is caused by the bacteria, *Chlamydia psittaci*, and is often associated with psittacine (i.e., parrot type) birds kept as pets; however, this bacteria can also infect poultry and non-psittacine birds like doves and pigeons.

### **Who gets psittacosis?**

Most human infections have been reported as having been related to exposure to pet psittacine birds, like parakeets. Human illness with psittacosis has also been documented from exposure to poultry and free-ranging birds including doves, pigeons, birds of prey and shore birds.

### **Where are the bacteria that causes 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 of psittacosis is possible, but thought to be rare.

### **What are the symptoms of psittacosis?**

The most common symptoms in humans are fever, headache, feeling of weakness, muscle aches, chills, and a nonproductive cough. These symptoms can present as a mild flu-like illness or, rarely, progress to more severe disease like pneumonia.

### **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?**

Mild to moderate cases of psittacosis are typically treated with antibiotics of the tetracycline group that are taken by mouth for a minimum of 10 days. More severe cases are typically treated with the same type of antibiotics, but given intravenously. 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 many 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. Pet bird owners who become ill with

symptoms of psittacosis should discuss their bird contact with their healthcare provider.

### **How can I get more information about psittacosis?**

- If you have concerns about psittacosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/atypical/psittacosis.html>.

Quick Links

[Psittacosis Compendium and Attachments](#)

May 2016