

Psittacosis

❑ What is Psittacosis?

- ✓ Psittacosis (also known as parrot fever or ornithosis when it occurs in people, or avian chlamydiosis when it occurs in birds) is an uncommon illness caused by infection with the bacteria, *Chlamydophila psittaci*.
- ✓ People acquire the disease from infected birds.
- ✓ The psittacosis bacteria have been isolated from more than 175 species of birds, most commonly psittacine birds (parrots, macaws, cockatiels, parakeets and related species).
- ✓ Although all birds are susceptible, pet birds (parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatiels) and poultry (turkeys and ducks) are most frequently involved in transmission to humans. Other caged birds including pigeons, doves, love birds, and mynah birds can be infected. Canaries and finches are rarely infected.

❑ Symptoms

- ✓ Symptoms of psittacosis in people include fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, sensitivity to light, and cough.
- ✓ Some people have mild or no symptoms, while others can have severe pneumonia.
- ✓ Elderly and immunosuppressed people are most susceptible to infection.

❑ How soon do symptoms occur?

- ✓ The incubation period may range from 5 days to 4 weeks but is usually within 10 days.

❑ How is psittacosis spread?

- ✓ The illness is transmitted from infected birds through inhaling the bacteria in dried bird droppings and feather dust, such as when cleaning a bird cage. It can also be spread through bird bites, mouth-to-beak contact and handling feathers and tissues from infected birds.
- ✓ In birds, the symptoms include poor appetite, ruffled appearance, eye or nose discharge, abnormal color of the droppings, and diarrhea. Birds can spread the disease even when they do not appear ill.
- ✓ The infection does not spread from person to person. No special precautions are necessary for patients ill with psittacosis.
- ✓ Pigeon roosts are not common sources of human infection.

❑ Who is at risk for psittacosis?

- ✓ Pet store workers, those exposed to infected birds at pet stores or shows, and people who have recently purchased an infected bird are at the greatest risk. Pigeon breeders and poultry workers may also be at risk.

❑ How is psittacosis diagnosed?

- ✓ Psittacosis is usually diagnosed by its symptoms and a history of exposure to birds. Blood tests collected at the time of illness and again 2 to 3 weeks later can confirm the diagnosis.

❑ Can psittacosis be treated?

- ✓ Yes. Several commonly available antibiotics are effective in treating psittacosis in humans. With appropriate treatment, the vast majority of people fully recover.

❑ PREVENTION

- ✓ Do not purchase birds with signs of psittacosis or those kept in dirty or crowded conditions. Consult a veterinarian if a pet bird becomes ill.
- ✓ Before adding a new bird into a group, have the bird examined by a veterinarian and keep it isolated until your veterinarian recommends that it join the group. Veterinarians should report confirmed or suspected cases of psittacosis to Public Health at (206)263-8454.
- ✓ Cages and other surfaces in the area where infected birds were housed should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected with household bleach diluted 1:100 with water (2 tablespoons of bleach in a gallon of water) or another effective disinfectant. A dust mask and gloves should be worn by persons cleaning such areas, and droppings and dust should be moistened prior to removal to minimize aerosolization.
- ✓ Persons in contact with infected birds should consult their physician if they have symptoms of possible psittacosis.

Report all King County cases, including suspected cases, to Public Health by calling (206) 296-4774.

Available in alternate formats.