

Psittacosis Fact Sheet

Psittacosis is an infection caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia psittaci*

Psittacosis is usually spread to humans from birds

Birds in the parrot family (such as parrots, macaws, cockatiels, and parakeets) are animals that usually carry the infection. Other birds, like turkeys and pigeons, may also spread the disease. Both sick birds and birds that look healthy may spread *Chlamydia psittaci* bacteria, especially if the birds are stressed by crowding or shipping. Usually, people get infected after breathing dust from dried bird droppings or secretions. It is very unusual for one person to get psittacosis from another person.

Symptoms to look for:

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Cough
- Rash

Symptoms begin 1 to 4 weeks after the person breathes the infected dust. Psittacosis is usually a mild to moderate illness. The illness can be severe, especially in older people who do not get treatment. Even if you have had psittacosis, you can still get it again. See a doctor if you have flu-like symptoms or respiratory tract illness and you have been around birds that may be infected with *Chlamydia psittaci*. A blood test can be done to determine if you have psittacosis.

Early treatment with antibiotics can shorten the length of illness and prevent complications

Treatment must continue for at least 10 to 14 days after fever is gone.

Psittacosis can be prevented

- Avoid birds that are sick. Signs of illness in birds may include runny eyes, runny noses, or diarrhea, and birds that are thin or have ruffled feathers.
- Buy birds of the parrot family from dealers with exotic bird permits; birds are more likely to be infected if they are brought into the country illegally.
- Keep new birds away from other birds for 30 to 45 days; have the birds tested or treated for psittacosis before they are added to a group of other birds.
- Clean all bird cages, food bowls, and water bowls every day and disinfect them at least once a week. (To disinfect items, use a household bleach mixture [1½ cups

of bleach in 1 gallon of water], Lysol®, or rubbing alcohol. Wash the item with a household detergent, rinse with water, soak in disinfectant for 5 minutes, then rinse again. When cleaning birdcages, spray the floor of the birdcage with a disinfectant before cleaning to cut down on the dust that you could breathe. For new birds or cage changes, throw away wooden perches and other things that cannot be disinfected).

- Take sick birds to a veterinarian for treatment.
- Report all bird and human cases of psittacosis to your local health department.