



PSITTACOSIS Frequently Asked Questions

What is Psittacosis?

Psittacosis refers to any infection or disease caused by *Chlamydophila psittaci*. Psittacosis has also been referred to as parrot fever, ornithosis, and avian chlamydiosis.

Who gets Psittacosis?

Birds are the primary reservoir for *Chlamydophila psittaci*. All birds are susceptible to *C. psittaci* infections; however, pet birds (e.g., parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatiels), pigeons, and poultry (e.g., turkeys and ducks) are the most frequent species involved in transmission. Bird owners, pet shops employees, and veterinarians are the primary risk groups for psittacosis disease. Psittacosis outbreaks have also been reported in the poultry processing industry. Infection in humans can occur after just a brief exposure to infected birds or their contaminated excretions or secretions. Therefore, individuals with no obvious recreational or occupational risk can still become infected.

How is Chlamydophila psittaci spread?

The bacterium is shed through feces and nasal discharge of infected birds. Transmission occurs when these materials or other infectious tissues become airborne and are inhaled. Avian waste material may remain infectious for weeks. Psittacosis is not known to spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of Psittacosis?

For birds, *C. psittaci* infections may be symptomatic or asymptomatic. Symptoms include poor appetite, ruffled appearance, discharge from the eye or nose, and diarrhea. Even if asymptomatic, an infected bird may still shed the bacteria.

In humans, psittacosis may also be symptomatic or asymptomatic. Typically, psittacosis causes flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, headache, and chills) and can possibly lead to severe pneumonia and other non-respiratory health problems. Appropriately treated cases are rarely fatal in people. However, if left untreated, the disease may be severe and result in a high death rate, especially in older people.

How soon do symptoms occur?

The incubation period (i.e., time between exposure to the bacteria and onset of illness) is 5 to 14 days. Longer periods have been reported.

Does past infection with Psittacosis make a person immune?

Past infection does not provide lifelong immunity to Psittacosis.

What is the treatment for Psittacosis?

Psittacosis is treated with antibiotics such as tetracycline, doxycycline, erythromycin, and azithromycin. Contact your healthcare provider for appropriate diagnostic testing and

treatment. If left untreated, psittacosis can become severe, especially in immune-compromised persons. Tetracycline is also effective in birds. Contact your veterinarian for appropriate treatment.

What can be done to prevent the spread of *Chlamydophila psittaci*?

For pet birds, the cage should be cleaned often so that waste material does not accumulate, dry, and become airborne. Currently, the law requires that birds from the parrot family imported from foreign countries be quarantined prior to sale. During this time, they are given feed containing tetracycline. However, the duration of quarantine is typically shorter than the 45 days required for proper treatment. Consequently, federal authorities recommend that breeders and importers make certain all domestic nestlings and imported birds are given tetracycline in the feed for the 45 continuous days to prevent the spread of psittacosis from birds to humans.

For pet birds that are suspected to be infected, contact your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment. Keep circulation of feathers and dust to a minimum. To assist with this, wet mop floors with disinfectants frequently, spray floors with disinfectant solutions prior to sweeping, and prevent wind or air currents from circulating contaminated dust.

Where can I get additional information on Psittacosis?

Contact the Georgia Division of Public Health, Epidemiology Branch at 404-657-2588.

Links:

- CDC - http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/psittacosis_t.htm
- Compendium of measures to control *Chlamydophila psittaci* (formerly *Chlamydia psittaci*) infection among humans (psittacosis) and pet birds, 2009 - <http://www.nasphv.org/Documents/Psittacosis.pdf>