

## Psittacosis

### Avian Chlamydiosis

#### What is psittacosis and what causes it?

Psittacosis (sit-ah-CO-sis) is a respiratory disease caused by the bacteria *Chlamydophila psittaci* (cla-mid-EE-Oh-file-ah SIT-a-sigh). In birds, the disease is also called ornithosis (or-ni-THO-sis), or avian chlamydiosis (cla-mid-EE-Oh-sis), or parrot fever.

#### What animals get psittacosis?

Psittacosis affects a variety of bird species. It occurs most often in parrots, parakeets, pigeons, doves and mynah birds. The disease is sometimes seen in ducks and turkeys, but is rare in chickens.

#### How can my animal get psittacosis?

Infected birds shed the bacteria in their droppings and nasal discharges. Other birds can be infected by inhaling (**aerosol**) dust from these dried infected droppings or by ingesting the bacteria while eating (oral). The bacteria can also be spread by objects (fomites) that have been in contact with infected droppings or nasal discharges, such as food dishes, perches, toys.

Biting insects, mites and lice (**vectors**) can also spread the disease.

#### How does psittacosis affect my animal?

Some birds infected with the bacteria show no signs of disease and are called carriers. These carrier birds can shed the bacteria when they are stressed from illness, nutritional deficiencies, breeding, or overcrowding and infect other birds or people.

Birds that are sick may have loss of appetite, weight loss, ruffled feathers, yellow or greenish diarrhea, difficulty breathing, nasal discharge, weakness or trembling and swelling of the tissues surrounding the eyes. Poultry will also have decreased egg production. Trembling or difficulty walking may be seen in ducks.

#### Can I get psittacosis?

Yes. People can get psittacosis by inhaling (**aerosol**) dried droppings or secretions from infected birds. Direct contact with sick birds can also spread the disease to humans. Psittacosis is a health hazard for people who work in close contact with birds, such as bird or pigeon fanciers, bird dealers and breeders, poultry workers, pet shop employees, and veterinary clinic employees. Psittacosis can also be spread person to person.

Signs of disease in humans include mild flu-like signs (fever, chills, headache) and a dry cough. Difficulties breathing or pneumonia can also occur. Severe cases may affect the heart, liver or nervous system.



**Psittacosis**  
is a bacterial disease  
that can be spread by  
contact with birds or bird  
droppings.

Photo from animalworld.com.

#### Who should I contact, if I suspect psittacosis?

##### In Animals –

Contact your veterinarian.

##### In Humans –

Contact your physician immediately.

#### How can I protect my animal from psittacosis?

There is no vaccine available for birds against psittacosis. The best prevention is keeping your birds in a clean environment with good air flow, providing healthy nutrition and avoiding stress or overcrowding. Make sure any new birds introduced into a home are free of avian diseases. You may want to quarantine new birds for a period of time before introducing them into your flock.

#### How can I protect myself from psittacosis?

Avoid close contact with sick birds. Wear gloves, masks, eye protection and gowns to protect yourself when working with sick birds or when cleaning bird housing areas or cages.

#### For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Psittacosis at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

CDC website. Psittacosis at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/psittacosis\\_t.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/psittacosis_t.htm)