

Psittacosis Fact Sheet

1. **What is psittacosis?** - Psittacosis is a disease caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia psittaci*. The bacterium is usually transmitted to humans from infected birds including parakeets, parrots, pigeons, turkeys, ducks and others. Most cases of psittacosis are acquired from exposure to psittacine birds (e.g. parrots and parakeets); however, there has been documented transmission of psittacosis from poultry and other free ranging birds such as doves, pigeons, birds of prey, and off shore birds. Since 1996, fewer than 50 confirmed cases were reported in the United States each year. Many more cases may occur that are not correctly diagnosed or reported

2. **Who gets psittacosis?** - Since birds spread this disease, pet store workers, bird hobbyists and workers in poultry processing plants are at increased risk of disease. Although usually mild or moderate in character, human disease can be severe, especially in untreated elderly persons.

3. **How is psittacosis spread?** - A person is infected by inhaling the organism from infected droppings, secretions and dust from feathers of infected birds. Apparently healthy birds can be carriers and shed the agent, intermittently or even continuously for weeks or months. Person-to-person transmission is rare, and it is not necessary to isolate hospitalized patients.

4. **How soon after infection do symptoms appear?** - The incubation period (period between exposure and the beginning of symptoms) is usually 10 days with a range of 5 to 19 days.

5. **What are the symptoms of psittacosis?** - The disease may have a sudden or insidious onset. It is an illness most commonly characterized by fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a dry cough. Pneumonia (lung infection) is often evident on chest X-ray. Mild forms may be confused with common upper respiratory viral infections similar to the common cold. Many infections occur with no symptoms.

6. What is the treatment for psittacosis? - Antibiotics such as tetracycline are often prescribed.

7. How is psittacosis diagnosed in humans? – The bacteria can be grown from sputum or tissue in specialized laboratories, but this is difficult. The diagnosis is most commonly made by collecting sequential blood specimens to look for an increase in the body's immune response to the infection.

8. What can be done to control or prevent psittacosis? - People should be aware of the danger from household or occupational exposure to infected pet birds. Government authorities regulate the importation, raising, and sale of birds to prevent and eliminate infections by quarantine of birds and appropriate antibiotic treatment. Bird species prone to psittacosis should only be purchased or obtained from reliable sources. As with any respiratory infection, coughing patients should be instructed to cough into tissue paper. Suspected cases should be reported to the health department for investigation.

9. For more information about psittacosis:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/psittacosis_t.htm

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.

March 21 2013