



PSITTACOSIS

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is a zoonotic disease (diseases spread from animals to people) caused by a bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci*. Birds (including parrots, turkeys, ducks and pigeons) can be infected and shed the bacteria in feces. Psittacosis can occur in persons when they are exposed to droppings or tissues from infected birds. Psittacosis infection in people is not very common in Canada.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

Symptoms appear within four to fifteen days after exposure and include fever, headache, chills, and sometimes pneumonia. Occasionally, the disease may cause severe complications.

How is psittacosis spread?

Infected birds, even if they do not appear sick, can shed bacteria in their feces. Some birds may remain infected for life and shed bacteria if they are stressed from another illness or event. Psittacosis is spread when a person inhales dust (and bacteria) from dried droppings. Pet birds (parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatiels) have been associated with human cases. Handling infected birds in slaughterhouses has also been a method of disease spread.

How is psittacosis diagnosed?

Psittacosis is diagnosed by symptoms, history of exposure, and laboratory testing.

Who is at risk of psittacosis infections?

Usually occupational exposures result in infections in persons (for example: bird owners, veterinarians and abattoir workers).

How can psittacosis be prevented?

Pet birds should be purchased from a reliable source that adheres to current law and recommendations. Cages of pet birds should be cleaned often so feces do not accumulate.

Follow basic precautions to prevent disease transmission when handling animals. Wear waterproof gloves and thoroughly wash hands after handling.

How is psittacosis treated?

Antibiotics are an effective treatment for psittacosis.

What is the Public Health response?

Health care providers and laboratories must notify cases of psittacosis to Public Health. Public Health staff may interview the health care provider and patient (or caregivers) to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

Further Information

For additional information, contact your health care provider, local [Public Health office](#), or Telecare 811.

Useful websites:

Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca