

## Psittacosis

Psittacosis (also known as chlamydiosis or ornithosis) is a widespread disease caused by an organism called *Chlamydophila psittaci*. It is the only significant disease that **can transmit from our companion or aviary birds to us as owners**.

Transmission of Psittacosis is primarily by inhalation of infected dust from **droppings** or from sneezed **aerosol** droplets. It is enhanced by **close contact with sick birds** that are shedding the organism. The disease is most often seen in birds that have been recently purchased, housed in pet shops or boarded with other birds. Birds do not have to show symptoms of disease in order to transmit *Chlamydiophila*. Birds tend to shed the organism under conditions of stress. Approximately **10%** of healthy birds can carry Psittacosis with no clinical signs of disease.

### Clinical Signs

There are no specific signs of disease that are characteristic of psittacosis. Some birds may show general 'sick' symptoms – lack of appetite, weight loss, depression and listlessness, watery green droppings, **discharge from eyes or nose**, or even sudden death. Of course, these signs may be related to diseases other than psittacosis. Many birds carry the Psittacosis organism but do not show any signs of disease under stable conditions. These birds may become sick after some stressful occurrence, or breeding birds may pass the organism on to their off-spring, which may die in the nest or at weaning. Young birds are most susceptible to a severe debilitating infection than are adult birds. Adult birds can develop chronic disease.

### Diagnosis

Diagnosis of Psittacosis in birds is now easy due to the development of modern detection methods. Generally a **blood test** is required. Many birds have multiple problems making diagnosis difficult. Preventative testing is essential to ensure the health of your bird.

### Treatment

If psittacosis has been diagnosed in one of your birds, we would generally recommend treatment of all exposed and potentially infected birds. To reduce the spread of the disease, it is imperative that the patient be **isolated** from other birds. The success of treatment depends upon the species, age, presence of concurrent infections, and immune status of the patient. Medication can be given by **injection**, oral administration or in drinking water. The specific medication and route of administration can be discussed and decided upon to suit your exact requirements. The treatment period will last for a minimum of 45 days. Depending on the condition of the patient, other forms of supportive therapy may be necessary. There is no long lasting immunity to the disease, and birds are unfortunately susceptible to re-infection even after full recovery from previous treatment.

#### During treatment the owner must:

- Clean the premises with a suitable disinfectant to kill the organism.
- Exercise extreme caution when handling bird droppings.

- Separate and isolate any birds that may show any signs of disease.
- Avoid contact with birds by elderly, sick, very young persons, pregnant women or those people who may be immuno-compromised.
- Most importantly, reduce stress in the bird's environment.

Further testing of affected birds is advised following therapy, as the treatment may not be fully effective, even though clinical signs may be normal. In extreme cases, especially those involving aviaries with significant losses, euthanasia may be necessary for individual birds if multiple tests indicate a persistent infection after repeated treatments.

## Preventative Measures

The following recommendations help prevent psittacosis in flocks or household pets.

- Take all new birds to an avian veterinarian immediately after purchase (and before introduction) for a Chlamydia test.
- Buy birds from reputable suppliers who perhaps test for Chlamydia on a regular basis.
- You may like to check with us for a list of reputable bird breeders or suppliers
- Isolate all newly acquired birds for at least 6 weeks
- Periodically monitor breeding stocks for chlamydiosis

## Psittacosis in Humans

This organism is capable of being transferred from birds to humans, but this rarely occurs despite the relatively high incidence of infections in birds. Although psittacosis infection in humans is normally mild, it is potentially dangerous for persons who are sick, elderly or immuno suppressed. Persistent flu like symptoms such as fevers, chills, headache, weakness, fatigue and respiratory signs should be reported to your medical practitioner.

Although this is a serious disease, with **testing and treatment**, the risks to you and your bird's health is minimal.