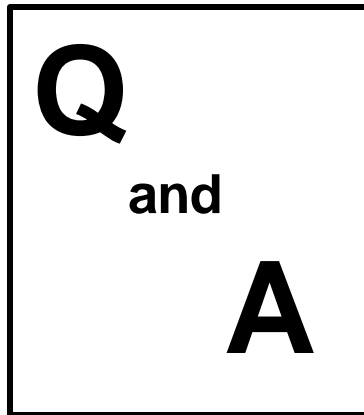


What is Psittacosis?



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What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis (also known as chlamydiosis, parrot fever or ornithosis) is a disease caused by an organism called *Chlamydophila psittaci* that infects a variety of bird species and, in some cases, can be passed on to humans.

What types of birds are most susceptible?

Young birds of all types, especially psittacine birds (parakeets, macaws, cockatiels) have the greatest probability of being infected, although non-psittacine birds, particularly pigeons, doves, turkeys and mynah birds, are also at risk.

How is the disease spread?

The organism is shed in an infected bird's droppings and nasal discharge, and can remain contagious for several months. Other birds can become infected by inhaling the dust from the contaminated waste or other contact. Stressful situations such as malnutrition, shipping, overcrowding, chilling and breeding may activate the shedding. Birds that appear healthy may be carriers.

How can I tell if my bird is infected?

Infected birds may be drowsy, have a loss of appetite or ruffled feathers. Other possible signs include watery nasal discharge and diarrhea with green or yellow-green droppings. Diagnosis can be difficult because these symptoms are similar to those associated with other diseases. It is also possible that your bird will not have any symptoms. Symptoms may vary with species, nutritional status, amount of stress and how psittacosis was contracted. The time between exposure and illness in caged birds is usually between three and ten days, but it is possible to express the disease even years after exposure.

How can I protect my birds?

- Prior to purchasing, check a bird supplier's background to see if they screen for psittacosis.
- Have an avian veterinarian examine and test your bird for psittacosis.

Maintain accurate records, including where and when the bird was purchased.

- Quarantine and observe new birds for five weeks before housing them with others.
- **Preventive care:**
 - Clean cages daily.
 - Change food and water bowls daily.
 - Clean and disinfect cages before transferring in new birds.
 - Make sure there is adequate space and ventilation in cages.
 - Feed a balanced, wholesome diet.
 - Don't stack cages.
 - Use solid-sided cages for adjoining housing.
 - Avoid contact with wild birds.
 - Do not dust or use a vacuum cleaner.

What can I do if my bird becomes infected?

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine against psittacosis; however, treatment is usually successful. All birds that are infected should be isolated and treated by a veterinarian. If psittacosis is suspected isolate your bird and have him/her tested. Treatment must last for a minimum of 45 days. Some birds are resistant to the common treatment and must be treated accordingly.

Care during infection:

- Reduce stress.
- Make sure your bird continues to eat.
- House birds in clean cages with adequate room.
- Clean cages often by thoroughly scrubbing with detergent, then disinfecting, air drying and re-rinsing.

Frequently wet-mop under and around the cage with disinfectants to reduce dust (do not use a vacuum cleaner).

- Your avian veterinarian can recommend disinfectants that will kill the *Chlamydothila psittaci* organism.
- Use wire mesh-bottomed cages with newspaper liners underneath.
- Cage waste should be frequently removed and double-bagged before disposal.
- Because your bird can be re-infected, it is necessary to continue to avoid exposure to infectious materials after treatment.

What are the symptoms in humans?

Infected humans usually have flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, weakness, tiredness, headaches, nervousness and possibly respiratory problems. However, symptoms can vary from no signs to pneumonia.

Psittacosis is especially dangerous in humans because of the confusion about it. Many physicians mistakenly believe that psittacosis has been eliminated from the pet bird population. Antibiotics are often prescribed that won't treat the disease.

How can I protect myself?

Infection in humans is rare and results from inhaling infected dust from droppings. Other possible sources include bird bites, mouth-to-beak contact and bird handling without washing hands afterwards. People on immunosuppressive drugs (cortisone, transplant chemicals) or people with immunosuppressive diseases (AIDS, cancer) are especially susceptible. Ideally, they should use protective clothing, gloves, a paper surgical cap and a well-fitting hepafilter mask when handling infected birds and cleaning their cages. A doctor should be called if respiratory illness develops.