



THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
Occupational Health Program

Psittacosis (Avian Chlamydiosis)

1.0 Introduction

Chlamydia psittaci is a type of bacteria that often infects birds. Humans can become infected with *Chlamydia psittaci* and develop a disease known as psittacosis. This disease is most often associated with people working with domesticated birds such as parrots and cockatiels, or poultry such as turkeys and ducks.

2.0 People at Risk

Bird owners, poultry workers, veterinarians, aviary and pet shop employees are at risk of developing psittacosis. Anyone can contract psittacosis, but adults are more susceptible to contracting the disease than children.

3.0 Transmission

The bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci* is shed in droppings and respiratory secretions of infected birds. Sometimes the birds do not show signs of disease or even appear sick. Psittacosis may result if the infected droppings and secretions turn into a dry dust, which becomes airborne and is inhaled by humans. Infected birds, although rare, can also infect humans through bites and mouth to beak contact. Typically, humans do not spread psittacosis to other humans, however it is possible.

4.0 Symptoms

Infected birds may not have signs or symptoms of illness.

Bird signs and symptoms of *Chlamydia psittaci* infection:

- Poor appetite
- Inflamed eyes
- Difficulty breathing
- Diarrhea

Most people begin developing signs and symptoms within 5-14 days after exposure to the bacteria. Although atypical, the time frame can be longer.

Human signs and symptoms of psittacosis:

- Fever and chills
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Dry cough

Psittacosis can progress to cause pneumonia, lung infections, and lead to hospitalization. Although rare, in extreme cases it can even cause death. If you are exposed to birds and begin experiencing the above symptoms please consult with your primary health care provider (PHCP). **Psittacosis symptoms**

are often the same as those for other respiratory illnesses, therefore it is importance to print this information sheet and provide it to your health care provider if you are at risk for for psittacosis.

5.0 Diagnosis, Prevention and Treatment

Psittacosis Prevention:

- Buy birds from only reputable suppliers.
- Avoid bird overcrowding to limit the concentration of bird droppings or secretions and reduce airborne risk of exposure.
- Keep cages clean, and ensure food and water bowls are cleaned daily.
- Animal care workers providing treatment and husbandry for birds should wear appropriate PPE when cleaning out cages, or otherwise exposed to bird droppings. This includes wearing a mask, disposable gloves, a lab coat or disposable gown.
- Practice good personal hygiene after caring for any birds. This includes washing hands thoroughly after providing bird husbandry,

Psittacosis Diagnosis:

Psittacosis can be very difficult to diagnose as rapid tests are not available. It is diagnosed by culture, serology or PCR amplification of sputum collection, blood, or nasal/throat swabs to detect the bacteria. Testing is only offered by specialized clinical laboratories.

Psittacosis Treatment:

People diagnosed with psittacosis are treated with antibiotics. Most improve quickly if the antibiotic regimen is started soon after symptoms develop and the course completed as directed by their health care provider.

6.0 Resources

For additional information, please use the following link: [CDC Psittacosis link:](#)

For further information related to possible zoonotic disease exposure, or further related resources, please contact UT Occupational Health Nurse Bryan Cranmore RN, COHN at bcranmore@utk.edu, or for urgent response the OHP nurse can be reached at 865-755-8924

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