

What is Psittacosis?

Psittacosis is an acute respiratory disease caused by a bacteria called *Chlamydophila psittaci*. It is usually transmitted to humans from birds, including parakeets, parrots, pigeons, turkeys, ducks and others.

Who is at risk for psittacosis?

Because this disease is spread by birds, it is occasionally found in pet store workers or people who have recently purchased an infected bird, particularly birds of the parrot family. It may also be found in farmers and slaughterhouse workers who process turkeys and ducks. Laboratory personnel studying *Chlamydophila psittaci* are also at risk.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

The symptoms may include fever, headache, rash, chills, muscle pain and sometimes respiratory problems. Respiratory symptoms are often mild when compared to pneumonia. Diarrhea and altered mental status are less common symptoms. Encephalitis, myocarditis, and thrombophlebitis are occasional complications and relapses may occur.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The period between exposure and the beginning of symptoms is typically 5 to 14 days, but can be longer.

How is psittacosis spread?

Psittacosis is usually spread by inhaling dried droppings, secretions from eyes or beaks and dust from feathers of infected birds. Handling infected birds in slaughterhouses also may spread the disease. Infected birds that show no symptoms may spread the organism to other birds or humans. Human-to-human spread is very rare.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

This disease is very rarely spread from person to person.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health-care professional can make a positive diagnosis using laboratory tests.

What is the treatment?

Antibiotics such as tetracycline often are prescribed. Although the disease is often mild in humans, it can be severe and may result in death, especially in untreated older people.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. A person can catch the disease again.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have psittacosis?

No. Infants, toddlers and school-aged children should not be excluded unless the staff determines the child is unwilling or unable to participate in activities. Children should also be excluded if the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

All others can attend work and other functions as long as they are well enough to do so.

What can be done to prevent the spread of psittacosis?

General guidance for prevention includes:

- Identify the source of the human infection. If a bird is identified, investigate other humans and birds that had contact with that particular bird. Suspected birds should be evaluated by a veterinarian.
- Exposed birds should be treated.
- If birds are kept as pets, clean the cage often so that fecal material does not accumulate, dry up and become airborne.
- Contaminated cages should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected thoroughly before re-use. Gloves, and a mask (N95) should be worn when cleaning contaminated cages or handling contaminated birds.
- Always wash hands with soap after working with birds.
- Current laws require that members of the parrot family that are imported from foreign countries be kept in a bird quarantine station prior to sale. Do not buy illegally imported birds as they are more likely to transmit the disease; buy birds only from reputable sources.

Additional Information

For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Chlamydomydia psittaci]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 286-288.