

Psittacosis

(Ornithosis, Parrot Fever)

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is a respiratory disease that is spread to humans from infected birds. The disease is caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci*. Although all birds are susceptible, pet birds (parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatiels) and poultry (turkeys and ducks) are most frequently involved in transmission to humans.

Psittacosis is an uncommon illness that occasionally occurs in pet store workers or people who have recently purchased an infected pet bird. It may also be found in farmers and slaughterhouse workers who process turkeys and ducks.

Most cases of psittacosis are usually mild or moderate, and often go undiagnosed. However, psittacosis can be severe in elderly people if left untreated.

What are symptoms of psittacosis?

Psittacosis can cause fever, headache, chills, muscle aches and, sometimes, pneumonia with a relatively dry cough.

The period between exposure to the bacteria and the beginning of symptoms may range from one to four weeks, but is usually 10 days.

How is psittacosis spread?

People usually acquire psittacosis by inhaling dust from dried droppings, secretions and feathers of infected birds or by handling infected birds in slaughterhouses. Infected birds often appear to be healthy, but can be carriers of the bacteria and can spread the infection to other birds or humans, particularly when they are under stress due to crowding or shipping.

Person-to-person spread of psittacosis is very rare.

How can psittacosis be prevented?

People are advised to buy birds from reputable sources only, as imported birds are much more likely to carry the bacteria. Clean the cages of pet birds often so that fecal material does not accumulate, dry up and become airborne.

How is psittacosis treated?

Antibiotics may be used to treat people with psittacosis.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

