

Psittacosis

Also known as Chlamydiosis, ornithosis and 'Parrot Fever,' is a relatively common and highly contagious disease of pet birds. Psittacosis can also be transmitted to humans. The cause of Psittacosis is a bacteria called *Chlamydia psittaci*. This disease is very common in birds illegally smuggled into the United States. Stress caused by crowding, chilling, shipping and many other changes to a bird's environment will lower resistance to disease, so newly acquired birds are at a higher risk of developing the disease than long-time pets.

There are many ways the disease can be spread, which include: contact with birds shedding the organism in respiratory discharges, droppings and feather dust, and contaminated food and water supplies. In addition, parents can infect their nestlings with feeding. Birds can also be carriers, spreading disease, even though they themselves show no outward signs.

Signs To Watch For: Unfortunately, there are no distinctive signs characteristic to Psittacosis. Signs that may be suggestive include:

- Any newly acquired bird that becomes sick.
- Watery, yellow or lime green urates.
- General signs such as appetite loss, weight loss, depression, lethargy, and nasal discharge.
- Sudden death has also been known to occur.

Veterinary Care: There are specific tests available for diagnosing Psittacosis. However, test results should be interpreted in conjunction with a complete history, physical exam and any other necessary tests. Once diagnosed, treatment should begin immediately. The antibiotic Tetracycline is the only approved drug for the treatment of this disease.

The type of tetracycline and route of administration will be determined by your veterinarian. Treatment usually must be continued for at least 45 days. Very sick birds will also need supportive care. Recovered birds can be reinfected and thus periodic testing following treatment is recommended. During treatment it is also important to isolate all sick birds, thoroughly clean and disinfect all cages and surroundings, and keep circulation of feathers and dust to a minimum. All bird droppings and contaminated equipment should be incinerated or saturated with disinfectant and placed in plastic bags before disposing. Human contact should be kept to a minimum.

Psittacosis in Humans: Birds carrying psittacosis, whether sick or not, can transmit to humans. Fortunately it is uncommon and most cases are mild. However, immunosuppressed individuals are at highest risk. Symptoms include: Flulike symptoms such as fever, headache, respiratory signs and weakness.