

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

PSITTACOSIS

Psittacosis is a rare disease caused by a microorganism called *Chlamydia psittaci*. Psittacosis is also known as ornithosis or parrot fever, since it is usually transmitted to humans from pet or wild birds.

Symptoms

People usually show symptoms 5-19 days after exposure, which may include:

- Sudden fever, headache, chills and muscle pain similar to flu
- Dry cough with tightness in the chest, breathing difficulty and sometimes pneumonia

Symptoms in pet birds:

- Lack of activity and appetite, ruffled feathers
- Discharge from the nose and eyes, and green to yellow droppings
- Some birds can appear healthy, yet they are still carrying the bacteria. They may only get sick or shed the organism when they become stressed.

Transmission

- Psittacosis is usually spread by inhaling dust from the feathers or dried droppings of infected birds. The bacteria can also be found in fluids from the nose and throat of infected animals. The organism can survive in dried droppings and in the environment for a long time.
- Most human cases have been associated with pet birds such as parakeets, cockatiels, parrots, canaries, pigeons, doves, and lovebirds. Poultry such as chickens and turkeys have also spread psittacosis to humans. Those most at risk are people who work with birds and animals in aviaries, veterinary clinics, farms, slaughterhouses, and pet stores.
- Human to human spread has not been proven.

Treatment

- In humans, diagnosis can be made by blood tests that look for specific antibodies. Because there are so many strains, several tests must be run.
- Before effective treatments were available, a small percentage of people died from psittacosis. Today, antibiotics can be used to treat humans and birds and death is rare.
- Infection does not provide immunity to this disease, so it may be acquired again.

Prevention

- Infected birds and other birds exposed to them should be treated by a veterinarian and kept separate from healthy birds.
- Notify the Ohio Department of Agriculture when the source is a poultry farm or facility.
- Cage papers can be lightly misted with a disinfectant to dampen dry stool and keep dust down before removal. Dirty papers should be placed in plastic bag then tied. This bag should then be placed on another clean bag and disposed of.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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