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What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is an infectious disease caused by *Chlamydia psittaci*, a type of bacteria that most often infects birds. While not a common cause of human illness, most people become ill from exposure to parrot-type birds kept as pets, although some other types of birds can also cause human infection.

Who gets psittacosis?

People of any age can get psittacosis. Persons at greatest risk include those who have routine contact with birds such as pet bird owners and breeders, pet shop employees, zoo employees, poultry workers and veterinarians. On average, fewer than 10 human cases of infection from *Chlamydia psittaci* are reported each year in the United States. The last reported case of psittacosis in Virginia occurred in 2022.

How is psittacosis spread?

The bacteria can infect people who care for and clean up after infected birds. Some infected birds can appear healthy or have mild clinical signs while still shedding the bacteria in their droppings and respiratory secretions. Human infection with *Chlamydia psittaci* usually occurs when a person inhales bacteria that have been put up in the air from dried droppings or respiratory tract secretions of infected birds. Less commonly, birds infect people through bites and beak-to-mouth contact.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

In general, psittacosis causes mild illness in people. These symptoms include fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, and dry cough. Only rarely is more severe illness, like pneumonia, reported. The signs of infection in birds are not specific and include poor appetite, inflamed eyes, difficulty in breathing, and diarrhea. Infected birds do not always have symptoms or seem sick.

How soon after exposure do symptoms of psittacosis appear?

Most people begin developing signs and symptoms within 5 to 14 days after exposure to the bacteria. Less commonly, people report the start of symptoms after 14 days.

How is psittacosis diagnosed?

Psittacosis is a rarely reported condition, and the symptoms are like many other illnesses. For these reasons, doctors may not suspect it, making it difficult to diagnose. Common methods used to diagnose the condition include taking blood samples to detect specific antibodies the body makes in response to the infection or testing sputum (phlegm) or swabs from the nose and/or throat to detect the bacteria directly.

What is the treatment for psittacosis?

Psittacosis is usually treated with antibiotics. The length of treatment time will vary depending on the specific antibiotic used and severity of illness.

How can psittacosis be prevented?

While there is no vaccine to prevent psittacosis, there are things you can do to protect yourself and others. Protective measures include:

- Avoiding purchasing ill birds.
- Using water or disinfectant to wet surfaces and bird cages before cleaning.
- Isolating and treating infected birds
- Avoiding over-crowding of birds

For more information about psittacosis prevention visit the CDC's Preventing Psittacosis page at cdc.gov/psittacosis/prevention/index.html.

How can I learn more about psittacosis?

- If you have concerns about psittacosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- Visit the CDC page on psittacosis at cdc.gov/psittacosis/about/index.html for more information.

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