

# Psittacosis Infections (Human)

## Frequently Asked Questions



### What is Psittacosis?

Psittacosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia psittaci*. The disease primarily affects birds, particularly psittacine birds- including parakeets, lorikeets, and parrots. Humans can also become infected following exposure to infected birds.

### Where does Psittacosis occur?

The bacteria infect birds worldwide. Human exposure is most likely to occur when people are exposed to birds that are shedding bacteria in households, aviaries, pet shops, or avian exhibits.

### Do birds always appear sick when infected with *Chlamydia psittaci*?

Often the birds do appear unhealthy with ruffled feathers, depression, ocular and nasal discharge. However, birds are thought to be capable of shedding the bacteria without showing signs of being sick- particularly during periods of stress associated with overcrowding and shipping. Birds can shed the bacteria for several weeks.

### Do outdoor birds get psittacosis?

The causative bacterium has been found in most species of birds, including pigeons, however infection is most commonly thought to come from psittacine birds within enclosures.

### What are the symptoms in people?

Flu like symptoms are common, they can include: headache, fever, myalgia, and dry cough. Chest pain and abdominal pain can occur less frequently.

### What is the incubation period in humans?

The incubation period in humans is usually from 3-14 days, but sometimes longer incubation up to 30 days periods have occurred. Incubation periods help define when people are at risk of developing psittacosis following an exposure to infected birds.

### Are infections in humans common?

No, infections in humans do not frequently occur. Some people, especially immunocompromised persons or pregnant women can be more susceptible. Also, people with prolonged exposure including aviary and pet shop workers, veterinarians, and commercial poultry processors, are more likely to be exposed to infected birds.

### **How serious is the infection in humans?**

Infection that is appropriately diagnosed and treated with antibiotics is very rarely associated with severe disease. However, in a small number of cases, or in cases left untreated, infection can develop into serious conditions including pneumonia and involving multi-organ systems including the heart, liver, and lungs.

### **What should a person do if they are (symptomatic) and have a pet bird or have been to an aviary recently where there are infected birds?**

Seek medical attention immediately. Provide your physician with; a detailed list of symptoms, and history of contact with any infected or potentially infected birds.

### **What is the treatment?**

Psittacosis is an infection caused by bacteria, and it can be effectively treated with antibiotics. You should consult with your physician for the proper antibiotics to treat psittacosis. The duration of treatment will take 2-3 weeks.

### **How can the risk of Psittacosis be reduced?**

- Always purchase birds from a reputable dealer:
  - Birds that are illegally imported, or live in crowded or unsanitary conditions are at a higher risk of infection and more likely to shed infectious organisms.
- If your bird dies suspiciously it should be considered to be potentially infectious. Take proper care of handling any potentially infected animal:
  - Clean the cages and surrounding area with a solution of household bleach, recommended mixture is 1 gallon of water to 2 Tbs of bleach.
  - A mask and gloves should also be worn while cleaning suspected areas.
- When visiting aviaries:
  - If you are immunocompromised or pregnant, consult your physician before visiting.
  - Avoid visiting if sick or dead birds have been reported

### **Where can I find more information?**

- Go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and type psittacosis in SEARCH box

