

Psittacosis/Ornithosis

Fact Sheet

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is a reportable condition caused by *Chlamydia psittaci*, a type of bacterium found in bird droppings. The term is derived from the Greek word for parrot. Ornithosis is the term used when the infection is caused by birds other than parrots.

How is it spread?

Infection is acquired by inhaling dried excretions from infected birds. After initial inoculation in the respiratory system, the organism spreads via the blood stream. Incubation period is 5 to 19 days. Although all birds are susceptible, pet birds and poultry are most frequently involved in transmission to humans. Human-to-human transmission is rare but possible.

What are the symptoms?

Predominant presentation is a respiratory infection. Humans exhibit fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, and a dry cough. Pneumonia may be evident on x-ray. Progression may lead to endocarditis, hepatitis and neurological complications. Severe pneumonia may require intensive care. Fatal cases have been reported.

Who is at risk?

Infected birds may not have any symptoms. Tracing back infected birds to distributors and breeders often is not possible because of the limited regulation of the bird industry. It is an occupational disease of zoo and pet shop employees, poultry farmers and ranchers.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Psittacosis/Ornithosis fact sheet
- eMedicine – Medscape Reference, Psittacosis article July 2011

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