

What is Chlamydiosis?

Chlamydiosis, also known as psittacosis, is a disease that affects a wide range of bird species. It is transmissible from birds to humans. Since the human disease is usually associated with parrots (including parakeets or budgerigars), physicians often call the infection “parrot fever.”

Nationwide, between 100-200 human cases are reported annually, although the actual number of cases is probably much higher. Chlamydiosis associated with birds is a different disease from the human venereal disease known by the same name.

What Causes Chlamydiosis?

Chlamydiosis is caused by a bacterial organism, *Chlamydophila psittaci* (formerly known as *Chlamydia psittaci*), and is usually spread by inhaling the organism from dried feces. The bacteria is often transmitted from “carrier” birds. Carriers show no signs of illness, but actively excrete the chlamydia organism in their droppings.

What are the Signs and Symptoms in Birds?

Symptoms of chlamydiosis in pet birds can include one or more of the following: ruffled feathers, depression, diarrhea, discharge from the nares and eyes, sneezing, trouble breathing, dehydration, poor appetite, weight loss, and death. Many other bird diseases have similar signs, making definitive diagnosis difficult and sometimes impossible.

Treatment Precautions

Once successful medication of your bird is underway, shedding of chlamydiae will eventually stop. However, precautions must be taken to avoid infecting humans.

Your bird must be isolated during the treatment period, and one person should do all the cleaning, handling, and treatment, to minimize exposure. Individuals should care for healthy birds before handling sick birds. Protective clothing should be worn that can be disinfected or disposed of after use, including gloves, eyewear, rubber boots, and a respirator with N95 or higher rating. All protective clothing should be left in the bird room.

Because dried feces is more likely to be inhaled, frequent cage paper changes are very important. The cage papers should be moistened with disinfectant before changing to minimize dispersal of dried material. In order to keep feather and dust circulation to a minimum, since they may contain the infective organism, spray the area with a disinfectant or water before sweeping. Feces, sweepings, and other wastes should be incinerated or double-bagged for disposal. Also discard all items that cannot be adequately disinfected, e.g., wooden perches, ropes, and nest material.

Recommended disinfectants for cages, mops, floors, dishes, etc., include Lysol®, Roccal®, or Zephiran® solutions. Following disinfection, hot soapy water should be used, followed by clear water rinses.

Re-Exposure to Chlamydiosis

One month after the full 45-day treatment period is completed, your bird’s droppings should be tested for chlamydiae. Although this test is not completely accurate, it can provide some assurance that treatment has been successful. Repeated cultures over several months are also an effective monitoring tool. Despite having had chlamydiosis, birds and humans do not develop immunity to the disease. Boarding your bird or exposing it to other birds, e.g., pigeons housed outdoors can reintroduce the infection. Although this disease is of great concern to veterinarians and their bird-owning clients, it can usually be successfully treated. Even critically ill birds can sometimes be restored to normal health, as long as treatment is appropriate and given over a sufficient period of time.

If you suspect your bird has chlamydiosis, you are advised to seek medical care, contact your veterinarian, as well as report the case to MDARD at 1-800-292-3939.

For a copy of the NASPHV Compendium of Measures to Control *Chlamydophila psittaci* infection among humans and pet birds, go to www.nasphv.org.

For More Information

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What are the Signs and Symptoms in Humans?

Chlamydiosis in people can range from a mild flu-like infection to serious pneumonia. Fever, headache, and loss of appetite are common signs. Many people report painful and difficult breathing. Since physicians rarely suspect chlamydiosis, it is important for people who have been exposed to pet birds to request appropriate blood tests. Blood test results require time so physicians may prescribe an antibiotic during the waiting period. If you have chlamydiosis, chances are you will begin to feel better very quickly after beginning antibiotic treatment.

How are Infected Birds Treated?

Infected birds require treatment under veterinary supervision. Doxycycline is typically the antibiotic of choice, and can be given by mouth, injection, in the water or in the feed. Treatment must be given for a minimum of 45 days.



Prevention

To prevent chlamydiosis infection, the following steps are recommended:

- Maintain accurate records to aid in identifying sources of infected birds and potentially exposed humans. Records should include dates of transfer (purchased and sold), contact information of purchaser and seller (including names, addresses, and phone numbers), medical history of the bird, description of the bird (including species; name; sex, if known; and color); and any individual identification of the bird (band or microchip number).
- Avoid purchasing or selling birds with diarrhea, low body weight, or discharge from the eyes or nares.
- Isolate newly acquired birds or birds with recent contact with other birds (via traveling, fairs, etc.) for at least 30 days, and have your veterinarian test your new bird for chlamydiosis.
- Facilities boarding birds or selling birds on consignment are advised to require testing for chlamydiosis before birds enter the facility.
- Practice good biosecurity--keep cages, dishes, toys, and the bird area clean; position cages so bird waste will not transfer from one cage to another; thoroughly disinfect cages between bird occupants.



Chlamydiosis (Psittacosis) in Pet Birds



Facts, Prevention, and Treatment

Animal Industry Division
www.michigan.gov/mdard