

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is a disease found primarily in certain birds (parrots, parakeets) and other poultry (turkeys, geese and ducks, as well as other birds such as pigeons) that can be transmitted to humans.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

Symptoms include fever, headache, rash, muscle aches, chills, and upper or lower respiratory disease. Human disease can be severe, especially for untreated elderly people, but it is most often mild or moderate in others.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can take from 1-4 weeks to appear, but it is usually 1-2 weeks.

How is psittacosis spread?

Human illness occurs from breathing in bacteria from dried droppings, secretions, and dust from feathers of infected birds. Many seemingly healthy birds have the bacteria and they can spread it when stressed from travel or crowding. Pet birds are often the source for human infection.

Who gets psittacosis infection?

Anyone can get psittacosis if they are exposed to the dust and droppings of infected birds.

How long is a person infectious?

This isn't certain. Most people aren't very contagious, and if so, only when there is severe coughing from the disease. Birds can have lifelong infections.

What is the treatment for this illness?

Tetracycline type antibiotics are used to treat this disease.

Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?

No. People who are infected and have a cough should be instructed to cough into a tissue or a handkerchief.

What can be done to help prevent the spread of psittacosis?

- Obtain birds only from a licensed pet store or aviary.
- Pet owners and animal handlers should be made aware of the dangers of household or occupational exposure to infected birds and the risk of inhalation of dried bird droppings, even from seemingly healthy birds.
- Special care should be taken by bird owners to clean cages, etc with the least amount of disturbance of dried droppings, feathers, and dust.
- Birds that are bought, traded, or otherwise procured should be raised and handled in a way that prohibits psittacosis spread.