

PSITTACOSIS

Psittacosis is a **zoonotic** disease, which means that it can be transmitted from birds to people. It is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia psittaci*. It is best known for affecting parrots and parrot-like birds (causing avian chlamydiosis) but can affect other avian species as well as being passed to mammals and humans. It can be shed in body secretions – for example, faecal, nasal and ocular fluids. Infectious organisms can survive in the environment for several weeks and may be distributed by dust. The infection is mainly airborne.

Once the infection is passed to humans it cannot usually be passed from human to human, nor from humans back to birds. It is a chronic disease posing a particular risk to children, the elderly, and immunosuppressed individuals.

CLINICAL SIGNS

- In humans the common signs are headaches, neck pain and fever (similar to flu) progressing to respiratory infections and potentially pneumonia. It can also cause fatal heart disease (rare).
- Signs you may see in your bird include swollen eyes/eyelids, nasal discharge, sneezing, depression, ruffled feathers, weight loss, inappetence, bright green diarrhoea, feather colouration changes and occasionally nervous signs, or even sudden death.

DIAGNOSIS

- Psittacosis can be a difficult disease to definitively diagnose but may be suspected on a blood test or x-rays. The best way to identify the *Chlamydia* organism is by testing either an oral swab, or faecal samples collected over a 3-5 day period. Even this may not pick up all cases as the organism is only shed intermittently, especially in birds showing no clinical signs.

TREATMENT

- Treatment of birds generally involves an antibiotic course for 6 weeks and follow-up tests. Even a bird that tests negative for chlamydia after treatment cannot be guaranteed to be clear of infection, as false negative results can occur. Birds may enter a carrier state and can shed the organism in the future at times of stress.

If you have any concerns about your bird please contact the hospital and make an appointment with one of our exotics vets.