

Chlamydiosis

Occupational Respiratory Infection from Handling Psittacine and Passerine Birds

What is Chlamydiosis?

Avian Chlamydiosis is a bacterial infection caused by *Chlamydia psittaci*. It is also known as psittacosis (in psittacine birds), ornithosis (in poultry/fowl) and parrot fever. It infects wild and domestic birds worldwide, and infections have been identified in at least 465 avian species. Turkeys, ducks and pigeons are the most commonly affected domestic species. *Chlamydia* spp. are transmissible among species, including people, and zoonotic transmission is well known for *C. psittaci*.

How does infection occur?

The main modes of transmission are by the fecal-oral route or inhalation. Humans can become infected by breathing in air containing aerosolized organisms from the respiratory tract or feces of live or dead infected birds, or by handling infected birds, tissues or bedding. The viral particles are resistant to drying and can remain infectious for several months in organic debris (e.g., litter or feces). Airborne particles and dust help to spread the organism. Human disease most often occurs from exposure to pet psittacines (e.g., parrots, budgies, etc.). Infection spreading from person to person is rare.

What are the symptoms?

C. psittaci infects the upper and lower respiratory tract. Infections may be asymptomatic or clinical signs may include coughing, chills, fever, and headaches. Pneumonia and breathing problems are also possible symptoms.

How do I prevent it?

Wear proper PPE such as gloves, mask, goggles, and a gown when handling birds or tissues and when cleaning bird cages. Limit exposure to sick birds.

How is it treated?

Chlamydiosis is treated with antibiotics.

Resources used:

- The Center for Food Security and Public Health Zoonotic Disease Factsheets: Campylobacteriosis
- The Center for Food Security and Public Health Zoonotic Transmission Routes: Campylobacteriosis
- Chapter 28, Selected Zoonoses, (2015) *Lab Animal Medicine*, 3rd ed.