a Queensland Health fact sheet

Psittacosis

Description:

Psittacosis is a disease caused by the bacteria Chlamydia psittaci, which is usually transmitted to humans from birds in the parrot family. The bacteria is also found in other species including poultry, pigeons, canaries and sea birds. The disease is usually mild, however, in some people, particularly the elderly, it can produce severe illness.

Symptoms:

Psittacosis tends to produce a non-specific illness. Symptoms can be mild or moderate and may include fever, headache, rash, muscle aches, chills and non-productive cough. Occasionally more serious complications affecting the heart, liver or lungs may occur.

Most symptoms improve quickly with appropriate antibiotic treatment.

Transmission

The bacteria can be found in dried droppings, secretions and dust from feathers of infected birds. Humans can be infected by inhaling infected discharges or dust. The bacteria may survive in dust for several months. Infected birds may have no obvious symptoms. Human to human transmission is rare, but has occurred.

The time from contact with the bacteria and the development of symptoms is usually about one to four weeks.

Treatment:

Psittacosis is usually treated with antibiotics.

Prevention:

There is no vaccine for protection against psittacosis.

Educating people about the disease, and the importance of maintaining a clean living environment for pet birds will assist in preventing the disease.

Control

In addition to treating infected people, the spread of disease should be controlled by treating infected birds with antibiotics and ensuring that the environment in which they live is thoroughly cleaned. Protective clothing (including masks and gloves) should be worn when cleaning the cages of potentially infected birds.

Help and Assistance

For further information, please contact your local doctor, community health centre or nearest public health unit.

Other Resources

Queensland Health - A healthier you

Footnotes

Heymann, D., ed. 2004. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 18th edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association. 432-434

Queensland Government
Queensland Health

(c) 2008 The State of Queensland (Queensland Health)

Disclaimer: Please note that any material printed is regarded as an uncontrolled copy. It is the responsibility of the person printing the document to refer frequently to http://www.health.qld.gov.au for updates.