



## **PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET**

**Boston Public Health Commission  
Communicable Disease Control Division  
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# **Psittacosis**

### **What is Psittacosis?**

Psittacosis is an illness caused by a bacteria called *chlamydia psittaci* that is spread to people from infected birds. It is also known as Parrot Fever.

### **How is it spread?**

It is usually spread by breathing in dried droppings (feces) from infected birds. It can also be transmitted by handling infected birds' feathers or other body parts. Even brief exposure can lead to infection.

Although all birds are susceptible to psittacosis, pet birds (parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatiels) and poultry (turkeys and ducks) are most are the types of birds that most often spread the disease to humans.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, weakness, and a dry cough. Some people may experience difficulty breathing. If left untreated, pneumonia and other serious complications can develop. People usually get sick 7-14 days after exposure.

### **What should I do if I think I may have this illness?**

You should call your health care provider. A blood test is available to help diagnose psittacosis, but results may take several weeks.

Because psittacosis is an infectious disease, health care providers are required by law to report cases of it to the local board of health. In Boston, cases should be reported to the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-5611.

### **Is psittacosis treatable?**

The disease is treatable with antibiotics. Symptoms usually subside within 2-3 days. However, it is very important that all antibiotics prescribed be taken to prevent relapse.

**For more information, please contact  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Communicable Disease Control  
(617) 534-5611 or [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)**