

PSITTACOSIS

Psittacosis (chlamydiosis), caused by *Chlamydia psittaci*, is an ongoing problem in the pet parrot trade and should always be considered when dealing with a sick caged bird. It is a potentially zoonotic condition and care must be taken when post-mortem examinations are performed. The common signs are depression, sinusitis, conjunctivitis, respiratory problems, green diarrhoea and death. Definitive diagnosis on a live bird is difficult; the best test is currently considered to be a PCR test of faeces that have been pooled for 3 days. Owners should always be warned about the zoonotic risk, and culling rather than treating pets must be considered. All treatments should continue for at least 6 weeks and then a second test should be performed. Never guarantee that a bird is 'chlamydia-free', only that it gave a negative result at the time of testing, stating the test.

In humans there are many accounts of serious illness and death following the briefest contact with infected parrots. On the other hand, people working in quarantine facilities and pet shops sometimes remain healthy despite regular close contact with infected birds. Without question, however, a bird infected with *Chlamydia psittaci*, even though it appears clinically healthy, can be a considerable health hazard to anyone in the same room.

- The disease presents as anything from a mild flu-like illness to a severe generalised infection with cerebral, renal and haematological complications.
- The illness often starts with chills, fever and a frontal headache. An unproductive cough is often present and occasionally there is diarrhoea. If untreated the disease may progress to severe mental confusion, renal failure and death.

REFERENCES

- W. L. G. Ashton (1988) Psittacosis. In: *Manual of Parrots, Budgerigars, and Other Psittacine Birds*. Ed C. J. Price. BSAVA, Gloucester p 135-139
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