

Psittacosis

Information for wildlife volunteers and workers

Grampians Public Health Unit - 5 January 2024

Grampians Public Health Unit (GPHU) and Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit (LMPHU) would like to circulate this information about Psittacosis as we have cases of this condition within our regions.

Key Messages:

- Psittacosis is generally associated with exposure to infected wild or domestic birds or bird droppings, particularly those in the parrot family
- Psittacosis symptoms can be diverse and range from mild symptoms to severe pneumonia
- Remember to wear appropriate PPE when handling birds, inside bird enclosures, or working with grass cuttings and hay
- Seek medical advice if symptoms arise.

Background:

Psittacosis is caused by the bacteria *Chlamydia psittaci* and is usually transmitted to humans from infected birds in the parrot family, through inhalation of bacteria from secretions and droppings. Psittacosis is endemic in parrot species in Australia and has been detected in other birds and mammals, including horses. Past outbreaks have also been associated with gardening and use of a lawnmower without a grass catcher.

Precautions:

Remember to always wear appropriate PPE when handling birds, especially those that appear unwell. It is also advisable to wear a respiratory mask (such as an N95) when handling birds, cleaning cages, and handling cut grass or hay.

Symptoms and treatment:

Psittacosis is a rare disease and symptoms are diverse and can range from pneumonia to more general symptoms such as fever, headache, myalgia, rigors, dry cough or shortness of breath without another explained cause. Illness can range from mild to severe. Psittacosis is easily treated with antibiotics, especially when caught early. If you experience symptoms seek the appropriate healthcare and make sure to mention your work background and whether you have handled any animals or hay recently.

More information:

Refer to the Department of Health [Psittacosis webpage](#) for clinical guidance on symptoms, testing and public health notification requirements. Further information about psittacosis can also be found on the [Western Victorian PHN website](#), the [Agriculture Victoria website](#) and the [Better Health Channel](#). Surveillance information and data for psittacosis and other notifiable conditions in Victoria can be found on the [Department of Health webpage](#).