

COMMON PET BIRD DISEASES

AVIAN POLYOMAVIRUS INFECTION

A viral disease affecting all psittacines. Clinical symptoms are more noted to occur in pre-weaning psittacines. Eclectus parrots and caiques are more sensitive to the effects of the virus. The virus can be passed in feces, urates, feather dander and regurgitated fluids. Incubation prior to symptoms is usually 7-14 days. The virus may remain in the body and still be infective to other birds for 2 -12 months. Highly contagious.

Symptoms

1. Depression
2. Delayed crop emptying
3. Regurgitation in baby birds
4. Diarrhea and/or polyuria
5. Bright yellow urine with strings of mucus and urates
6. Bleeding under the skin
7. Abnormal feathering in fledgling birds
8. Sudden death



Diagnosis

1. Blood tests to detect viral DNA particles in the blood (indicates exposure)
2. Fecal/Urinate swab to detect viral DNA in excrement (indicates that virus is present in feces/urates/environment)

Treatment

1. Unfortunately there are no effective medications or therapies to treat a bird with confirmed polyomavirus infection.

Prevention (A USDA approved polyomavirus vaccine has been available for over 6 years. The vaccine is a killed product and has been proven to be 90-95% effective. Vaccination is effective in non-budgerigar psittacines only)

1. Vaccinate all breeding stock, all babies and all pet birds
2. Do not sell, ship or accept unweaned, non-vaccinated baby birds
3. Use biosecure shipping containers
4. Maintain a closed aviary (no new birds introduced without being vet tested and going thru a quarantine period at a separate location.)
5. Use a separate feeding utensil for each clutch of baby birds
6. Limit exposure of your birds to non-vaccinated birds and people that do not practice sound management principles and do not vaccinate their stock

PSITTACOSIS

A highly contagious bacterial disease caused by the organism *Chlamydophila psittaci*. This disease can cause infections in humans. Transmission is primarily from inhalation of dust from feathers and dried feces and urates.

Symptoms

1. Loss of appetite
2. Weight loss
3. Depression / lethargy
4. Discharge from eyes and/or nose
5. Diarrhea (classically - lime green diarrhea)
6. Sudden death



Diagnosis

1. Both blood and fecal tests are available to the Avian veterinarian to detect the organism, antibodies to the organism in the blood or DNA particles in either blood, tissue swabs or feces. Depending on the nature of the infection, the severity of the disease and the condition of the patient, the Avian veterinarian may choose any or all of the afore mentioned testing methods.

Treatment

1. The recommended drug of choice is 'Doxycycline'. The route of administration is either by medicated pellets, added to drinking water, directly by mouth or by injection.
2. The course of treatment is a minimum of 45 days. A negative test at the end of the 45 days should be considered as a true end of treatment.

Prevention

1. Consult an Avian veterinarian to consider testing all new acquisitions for chlamydo-phyla psittaci.
2. Buy birds from reputable breeders (get a recommendation from your local Avian veterinarian). See if the breeder tests their birds for chlamydo-phyla.
3. Isolate and quarantine all newly acquired birds for at least 4 weeks (30-60 days is recommended).
4. Periodically test breeding birds for chlamydo-phyla psittaci

FEATHER PICKING - Any age, any species, any environment



Causes

1. VIRAL DISEASES (Polyomavirus, Psittacine Beak And Feather Virus)
2. Parasites (mites, lice, intestinal giardia infection)
3. Bacterial and Fungal (Staphylococcus, pseudomonas, aspergillus, candida)
4. Nutritional (Vitamin A, calcium and total protein deficiency are most common)

5. Environmental (lack of adequate bathing, exposure to toxins, excessive stress)
6. Hormonal (Sexually mature but no same species mate, hence frustrated !)
7. Behavioral (Misplaced aggression towards family member, lack of discipline)
8. Chronic Disease (Underlying kidney, liver, respiratory or GI disease)

Diagnosis

1. Extensive history about food, location of cage, addition or loss of new pets or family members, exposure to cigarette smoke, cage design
2. Thorough physical exam
3. Laboratory testing :

Chemistry panel - to detect nutritional deficiencies, test liver and kidney function

Radiograph - check for lead or zinc, check for abnormalities in liver, kidney, lungs, air sacs, heart or bone structure

Ancillary Lab tests - Lead/zinc blood tests, blood analysis for fungal diseases, chlamydia

Pathology - biopsy of skin and/or feather follicle to identify specific diseases of the skin or feathers

Treatment - Each case is treated depending on the specific medical condition identified, if no medical condition is present after all tests have been run, refer to a behavior consultant

Prevention

1. Avoid airborne toxins
2. Protect against aggressive mates or house mates
3. Mist or shower 2-3 times a week. Use Avi Rain
4. Use a well known or an Avian veterinary recommended diet formulation for your specific bird (not all birds do well on every diet). I highly recommend to **Supplement feather picker's diets with Sunshine Factor.**
5. Get a well-bird check up every 12 months