



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARIANS, INC.

CSTE Annual Meeting

CSTE Position Statement 1995-16

Committee: Infectious Disease Committee

Title: Psittacosis Surveillance Support

Issue: Psittacosis (avian chlamydiosis) is a zoonotic disease that merits more attention by public health authorities. This disease is widespread among a growing pet bird population, yet fewer than 100 human cases are confirmed in the United States annually. The NASPHV Psittacosis Compendium Committee believes that the paucity of reported human cases is not the result of a decreased incidence, but the result of a decreased awareness of the disease by the public and medical community, the difficulty in confirming the diagnosis with commonly used serologic tests, and a lack of surveillance support on the national level.

Position to be adopted:

CSTE/NASPHV recommends:

- 1) CDC staff should convene a meeting with CSTE, NASPHV and ASTPHLD representatives to reevaluate the diagnostic methods currently in use for human and avian psittacosis, the interpretation of results, and the case definition. The committee's written recommendations should be provided to state and commercial laboratories.
- 2) Until specific serology is commonly available, CDC should facilitate the availability of the chlamydia micro-immunofluorescent test, for example at CDC, or through state public health laboratories or commercial laboratories.
- 3) CDC, with input of CSTE/NASPHV representatives, should reimplement a national surveillance system for psittacosis. The system should include an updated national psittacosis surveillance report form so that uniform data can be gathered.
- 4) USDA should develop laboratory tests to distinguish birds with acute infections and asymptomatic carriers from birds with previous infections, in order to assist public health and state agriculture officials in determining control interventions such as quarantines.
- 5) USDA should consider the regulation of interstate transport of birds (record keeping, banding, and tracking system) so that the source of potentially infected pet birds can be determined.

Background and Justification

Most, but not all of human infections result from exposure to birds. The bacterium has been isolated from 129 avian species. From 1982-1991, 1,344 human cases of psittacosis with six deaths were reported to CDC. Caged bird exposures accounted for 70% of human cases in whom source of infection was known. The largest single group of affected people were pet bird owners or fanciers (43%).

The popularity of birds as pets has been increasing. There are an estimated 12 million pet birds in 5.4 million households in the U.S. and the numbers are expected to increase. According to practicing veterinarians, psittacosis is a common cause of morbidity and mortality among pet birds, although

incidence data are lacking. In addition, many birds are asymptomatic shedders.

The confirmation of psittacosis in humans is a major diagnostic problem for public health authorities. The complement fixation test, as required by the current case definition, is rarely used by commercial labs. All the commercially available tests (ELISA as well as CF) are group specific for all chlamydia. They were specifically developed for *C. trachomatis*, not *C. psittaci*. Another respiratory chlamydia, *C. pneumoniae*, also cross-reacts on this test. The only specific test is a micro-immunofluorescent antibody test done by CDC. There has been confusion as to which CDC laboratory is responsible for performing this test.

Since 1985, CDC has discontinued all but passive surveillance of core data on human cases through the NETSS system. During this time, there have been changes in the pet bird industry. Federal restrictions are resulting in major reductions in bird importation. More birds are being domestically bred which might facilitate public health efforts to control this disease. Many confirmed human cases are associated with birds sold through large multi-state distributors and breeders. With the current surveillance system, there is extreme difficulty in linking cases from multiple states with a common source of infected birds.

The Compendium of Psittacosis Control was developed with CDC support to help public health agencies and veterinarians address the zoonotic implications of psittacosis and to standardize control procedures. To accomplish these goals, we must first be able to recognize the disease and identify its source. This requires improved diagnostic testing and strengthening of national surveillance.

Agency for Response: CDC
USDA

Agency for notification: ASTPHLD
ASTHO

Contact: Kathleen Smith
Ohio Dept. of Health
246 North High St.
PO Box 118
Columbus, Ohio 43266
(phone) 614-466-0283