

ICAP

Infection
Control
Assessment &
Promotion Program

** in conjunction with Nebraska DPH Division of Epidemiology*

Birds Kept as Pets in Long Term Care Facilities

Many long term care facilities have small aviaries or bird cages on site for the delight of residents. Similar to any other household, the germs from these birds can cause a variety of illnesses in people, ranging from minor skin infections to serious illnesses.

Human diseases associated with birds kept as pets¹:

- Cryptococcosis
- Histoplasmosis
- *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC, Avian Tuberculosis)
- Parrot Fever (Psittacosis, *Chlamydiophila psittaci*)

A protocol or policy for your facility should be in place to minimize risk to employees and residents. Here are some considerations:

Birds should be enclosed. They should not fly or roam around the facility¹.

Birds should not be housed in areas where food or drink is prepared, served or stored¹.

Wash hands both before and after handling birds, their toys, food, and water dishes. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer¹. Consider supervising or facilitating the hand hygiene of residents.

Report any scratches, bites, or any other inappropriate animal behavior to facility healthcare staff immediately so that wounds can be cleaned and treated promptly².

Employees or residents with compromised immune systems (for example, people receiving immunotherapy*) should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and potentially excluded from the direct care of the birds.

Outline the procedure for cleaning the cages and include use of personal protective equipment (for example, disposable gloves and a mask). Cleaning should include¹:

- Prior to cleaning a cage, transport birds to a clean cage.
- When cleaning droppings and cages, use disposable gloves, do not pick up droppings with your bare hands, and make sure to wash your hands thoroughly afterwards¹. Vacuums should not be used because they can aerosolize the germs in bird droppings.
- Clean bird cages and perches outdoors with a bottle of dish soap dedicated to this purpose, and use clean water.
- Disinfect bird cages after cleaning with either a dilute bleach solution (diluted properly according to label directions) or a commercial disinfectant made specifically for bird cages.

- Don't clean any equipment or materials in the kitchen sink: This includes cages and feed and water containers. Bacteria and other germs can contaminate your food preparation areas.
- Rinse all cages and equipment well after cleaning. To keep your pet birds healthy, it is important to rinse the residue from cleansers and disinfectants.

*Immunotherapy⁴ may include drugs to treat certain types of cancer, Crohn's Disease, Multiple sclerosis and Rheumatoid arthritis. Though not a complete listing, examples include Rituximab (Rituxan), Abatacept (Orencia), Trastuzumab (Herceptin), Adlimumab (Humira), Infliximab (Remicade), Etanercept (Enbrel)

1. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, Birds Kept as Pets, last accessed 1/4/2016
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/birds.html>
2. Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks. Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology, May 2015, Vol. 36, No. 5
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3. Nursing –Home Pets are Boon to Residents, New York Times.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/01/nyregion/nursing-home-pets-a-boon-to-residents.html?pagewanted=all>
4. Immunotherapy. Page last accessed 1/4/15 <http://www.drugs.com/health-guide/immunotherapy.html>