

# Salmonellosis: A Hidden Danger

By the World Parrot Trust

*Salmonella* is a gram-negative rod-shaped bacterium that can infect many species of animals. Salmonellosis, caused by any one of a number of *Salmonella* species, can cause havoc when it appears in a population. All types of *Salmonella* species produce an endotoxin, which is the agent responsible for causing illness. It can be a hidden danger because it can reside in soil and water for extended periods. This makes it easily picked up, and then transferred along, infecting host after host. Some hosts become carriers, spreading the bug into the environment.

In a parrot aviary, intermittent shedding by perpetual carriers can cause a cycle that is hard to break. The bacterium is shed in feather dust and feces; birds in the surrounding area are infected orally by ingesting contaminated food or water, or the bacterium is passed through into the egg. If infected birds are not treated they often die. People in contact with infected birds can also become ill.

Symptoms in birds include:

- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Drinking a lot of water
- Diarrhoea, sometimes bloody
- Depression
- Possibly arthritis

Symptoms (beginning 12-72 hours after infection) in humans include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Dehydration
- Chills
- Abdominal pain
- Possibly arthritis (Reiter's syndrome)

It is very important that infected people or animals be isolated: again, affected people may infect their birds and vice versa. Diagnoses in birds and humans are based on culture and sensitivity tests on bodily samples. Birds are usually placed on aggressive antibiotics (the appropriate ones chosen based on sensitivity tests) for 3-5 weeks and lactobacillus products to replace lost intestinal (beneficial) flora; people usually recover in 5-7 days without treatment other than oral rehydration *unless* the loss of fluid is so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized. Strict hygiene is necessary; regular cleaning of bird enclosures and floors and control of pests is a must – to prevent this disease from getting a foothold in your home.

## Sources:

**Avian Medicine: Principles and Application**, Abridged Ed., Ritchie, Harrison and Harrison, Wingers Publishing, 1997.

**Article “Zoonotic Diseases, Part I: Bird to Human Transmission”** by Linda Pesek, D.V.M.

<http://www.birdsnways.com/wisdom/ww23eiii.htm>

**“Salmonellosis” listing**, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Foodborne, Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases (DFBMD) [http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease\\_listing/salmonellosis\\_gi.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease_listing/salmonellosis_gi.html)

*This article is provided for information purposes only and should not replace a veterinarian's diagnosis. The World Parrot Trust encourages people caring for a parrot that is unwell to seek help from a qualified professional.*