Psittacosis (*Chlamydia psittaci*) (Ornithosis)

2010 CDC Case Definition

Clinical description

Psittacosis is an illness characterized by fever, chills, headache, myalgia, and a dry cough with pneumonia often evident on chest x-ray. Severe pneumonia requiring intensive-care support, endocarditis, hepatitis, and neurologic complications occasionally occur.

Laboratory criteria for diagnosis

- Isolation of *Chlamydophila psittaci* from respiratory specimens (e.g., sputum, pleural fluid, or tissue), or blood, or
- Fourfold or greater increase in antibody (Immunoglobulin G [IgG]) against *C. psittaci* by complement fixation (CF) or microimmunofluorescence (MIF) between paired acute- and convalescent-phase serum specimens obtained at least 2-4 weeks apart, or
- Supportive serology (e.g. *C. psittaci* antibody titer [Immunoglobulin M (IgM)] of greater than or equal to 32 in at least one serum specimen obtained after onset of symptoms), or
- Detection of *C. psittaci* DNA in a respiratory specimen (e.g. sputum, pleural fluid or tissue) via amplification of a specific target by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assay.

Case classification

**Probable**: An illness characterized by fever, chills, headache, cough and myalgia that has either:

- Supportive serology (e.g. *C. psittaci* antibody titer [Immunoglobulin M, IgM] of greater than or equal to 32 in at least one serum specimen obtained after onset of symptoms), OR
- Detection of *C. psittaci* DNA in a respiratory specimen (e.g. sputum, pleural fluid or tissue) via amplification of a specific target by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assay.

**Confirmed**: An illness characterized by fever, chills, headache, cough and myalgia, and laboratory confirmed by either:

- Isolation of *Chlamydophila psittaci* from respiratory specimens (e.g., sputum, pleural fluid, or tissue), or blood, OR
- Fourfold or greater increase in antibody (Immunoglobulin G [IgG]) against *C. psittaci* by complement fixation (CF) or microimmunofluorescence (MIF) between paired acute- and convalescent-phase serum specimens obtained at least 2-4 weeks apart.

Comment

Although MIF has shown greater specificity to *C. psittaci* than CF, positive serologic findings by both techniques may occur as a result of infection with other Chlamydia species and should be interpreted with caution. To increase the reliability of test results, acute- and convalescent-phase serum specimens should be analyzed at the same time in the same laboratory. A realtime polymerase chain reaction (rtPCR) has been developed and validated in avian specimens but has not yet been validated for use in humans (1).
References