

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease Virus (PBFD)

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease is an important disease of psittacine birds or parrots. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation out there on Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease, and there is also a lot of information that is still unknown.

What is Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease?

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) is caused by a very small virus that most commonly causes problems of the skin, feathers, and beak. In some birds, PBFD can also affect the internal organs. It all depends on the age of the bird when exposed.

What birds are at greatest risk?

All birds are at risk, but PBFD seems more of a concern in birds of an Australian, African, or Asian background such as Cockatoos, African Grey parrots, Senegal or Meyer Parrots, Ringneck Parakeets, and Lovebirds. PBFD cases have also been reported in in South American birds such as macaws and conures. We recommend all new birds be tested.

How is PBFD transmitted?

PBFD is transmitted by direct contact with infected birds or through contamination of water or feeding areas. The virus can be found in feces, feather dust, or crop contents regurgitated for babies. Since PBFD virus is blood-borne, it is believed to also be transmissible from the hen to her eggs.

When do birds get the disease?

Birds often become infected with PBFD virus at a very young age. The minimum time frame between exposure and signs of disease is 21-25 days, but it often takes much longer, from months to even years, for birds to show signs of illness.

How do we determine if a bird has PBFD?

Most commonly, a DNA probe test is run on a blood sample. In some cases, testing may also be performed on feather or skin samples, or a swab from the internal organs of a deceased bird. The test is very sensitive and specific, so incorrect results rarely occur.

What if my bird tests positive for PBFD virus?

The answer to this question depends on many variables, and will need to be discussed with your veterinarian. These variables include the age of the bird and its health status. Often a second test is indicated in an otherwise healthy bird approximately 60-90 days later. It is also prudent to test any other birds and notify the source from where you obtained your bird.

Is there a cure for PBFD?

NO. PBFD is much like human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). PBFD tends to weaken the immune system and make the bird more susceptible to other diseases it would normally be able to fight off.

Is there a vaccine available?

Not at the present time.

What is the best way to remove PBFD from a collection or facility?

- Test every individual for PBFD virus.
- Practice good quarantine protocol when you get a new bird. Keep new birds as far away from birds confirmed negative, until an avian veterinarian has declared them healthy. Birds that appear healthy but test positive for PBFD can shed the virus and cause huge problems.
- Clean surfaces with bleach diluted at 1 cup per gallon of water. Take precautions with fumes for yourself, other people and animals—particularly birds!! Items made of wood or other organic material can never be considered clean and should be discarded.
- In some cases, air conditioning and furnace filters should be replaced.
- Consult your avian veterinarian for more specifics if you have concerns about PBFD in your facility.