

# Lead Poisoning in Birds

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Lead poisoning is the most commonly reported poisoning of pet and wild birds. Lead toxicity not only occurs in urban areas, but in rural and suburban neighborhoods as well. Clinical signs of poisoning can be variable and depend on how much lead is eaten. Symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite, listlessness, weakness
- Loose droppings with abnormal color (green, black, pink, bloody)
- Vomiting, increased thirst
- Neurological signs to include blindness, incoordination, lameness, seizures

Diagnosis of lead toxicity is made by measuring blood lead concentration. This is a simple test requiring small amounts of blood. X-rays can be helpful in making the diagnosis and determining duration of treatment. X-rays may reveal lead particles in the gastrointestinal tract necessitating a longer period of therapy.

If lead poisoning is suspected from clinical signs and x-rays, treatment should begin immediately while waiting for blood lead results (which can take several days). Therapy consists of injectable medication (calcium EDTA) and supportive care for hospitalized birds. If diagnosed early, treatment is usually successful.

Preventative measures should be taken to remove all potential sources of lead from your pet's environment. All birds should be caged when unsupervised. Some items containing lead, which may be found in the environment, include:

- Hardware: old paint, plaster, galvanized wire, putty, solder, batteries
- Houseware: drapery weights, ceramic dishware, costume jewelry, alarm tape
- Furniture: Tiffany lamps, stained glass, mirrors, wrought iron welding
- Sporting goods: fishing weights, shotgun pellets

If necessary, testing the bird's environment may be helpful in eliminating potential sources of lead. Call your local department of health for information on testing. Remember that prevention is the best medicine!