

Construction micro-organisms: Psittacosis and other diseases from work involving bird droppings

Construction workers may be exposed to guano / bird droppings on some sites. This page tells you how to control this risk and why. You also need to be aware of the [general information on micro-organisms](#)^[1].

What you must do

Follow the [Assess, Control and Review model](#)^[2]. Pay particular attention to the following things:

Assess

Identify and Assess: The risk is mainly during refurbishment, building maintenance or demolition work. It is highest where there has been significant contamination.

Control

Prevent: Eliminate / limit contact with bird droppings where possible. Workers with a weakened immune system should not directly do tasks involving bird droppings.

Control: Where the work is unavoidable, control this risk by:

- **General controls** – follow the [general controls for harmful micro-organisms](#)^[3]. Pay particular attention to:
 - following good basic hygiene including regular hand-washing and avoiding hand to mouth/eye etc contact. Provide nailbrushes
 - taking rest breaks, including meals and drinks, away from the work area
- **Work method** – prevent any dust getting into the air by wetting down the work area. Do not use high-pressure washers as this creates contaminated airborne droplets. Consider using plastic sheeting to prevent contamination spreading.
- **Clothing** – wear protective clothing. The type will depend on the work. It may include waterproof footwear and gloves.
- **Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE)** – wear [RPE](#)^[4] if the work could generate

dust or aerosols. Choose RPE with an assigned protection factor of 20 (eg FFP3 disposable mask or half mask with P3 filter). For longer duration work consider powered RPE with the same protection (eg TH2 powered hood / helmet). Make sure any RPE is compatible with other protective equipment.

Review

Supervise: Ensure that controls such as work methods, PPE and welfare are effective and used by the workers. Anyone using tight fitting masks needs to be clean-shaven and face fit tested.

What you should know

Breathing dust or water droplets containing contaminated bird droppings can lead to several diseases including:

- **Psittacosis** – this is a rare infectious disease caused by a bacterium called *Chlamydia psittaci*. It is mainly associated with parrots and other similar species but does affect other birds, including pigeons. Symptoms are commonly a flu-like illness and pneumonia usually appearing 5-19 days after exposure.
- **Salmonella** – this may also be present in some bird droppings. It is a bacterial infection that can cause significant diarrhoea.

Link URLs in this page

1. general information on micro-organisms
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms.htm>
2. Assess, Control and Review model
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/managing-essentials/managing-essentials.htm>
3. general controls for harmful micro-organisms
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms.htm>
4. RPE
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/respiratory-protective-equipment/index.htm>