

How Clean Is Your Pet Bird Cage?

The less mess in your pet bird cage, the better for your pet bird.

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, Dip. ABVP – Avian Practice

Healthy birds generally don't carry organisms that would make them sick if they ingested their droppings, however, small amounts of potentially dangerous bacteria that might be just "passing through" the G.I. tract can end up growing exponentially in an open water dish per hour.

A bowl of drinking water with added vitamins can have a 100-fold increase in the bacterial count in a 24 hour period if it is contaminated with droppings or food. Change the water frequently, and rinse the water bowl. (Keep in mind that unless it is disinfected or washed thoroughly each time, a bioactive film will still remain on the container walls.)

It only takes four hours for soft food or dirty water to become contaminated with sufficient organisms to cause problems. In my practice, birds that have water bottles to drink out of have lower levels of potentially abnormal bacteria on their Gram's stains than those with water bowls.

While we normally think of worm problems being a medical issue of dogs and cats, pet birds can harbor roundworms (ascarids), as well as other types of intestinal parasites, such as the one-celled protozoa Giardia or Hexamita. Since roundworms have a direct life-cycle in birds, eggs passed in their droppings can be infective to them if ingested, so worm numbers can build up to dangerous levels in captivity. Protozoal infections can also cause medical problems in our pet birds.

What Lurks On The Cage Bottom?

A potentially dangerous health situation for pet birds can result if droppings are allowed to build-up in a cage, especially one without a grate. (A grate will help separate a bird from most of its droppings.) A wet cage bottom – either from droppings or from a water bowl spill - can create the perfect environment for certain organisms to thrive, including the fungus, Aspergillus. If the detritus in a wet cage bottom becomes stirred up, this will release fungal spores that can cause illness if inhaled by a bird. Aspergillosis can be a life-threatening or even fatal infection caused by these spores.

Wet cage bottoms also are very attractive to flies and other insects. Debris and fecal matter provide a perfect breeding ground for flies to lay eggs, allowing maggots to develop into more flies, which can carry infectious organisms when they walk across food or cage equipment. Cockroaches are also drawn to dirty cage bottoms.

Prevent your bird from becoming exposed to potentially dangerous organisms, keep its cage and environment clean.

Don't Forget To ...

Learn what your bird's normal droppings look like, and keep track of the average number of droppings that it normally passes in a day.

A normal dropping usually contains three portions: Urine, the clear portion of liquid waste from the kidneys Urates, the opaque, off-white to cream colored portion that results from the digestion of proteins Feces, the solid portion of waste from the gastrointestinal tract, usually brown to green in color, and formed, looking like a squiggly worm

Abnormal droppings are often the first sign that a bird has an illness. Increased urine, loose feces or a change in color of the urates are all common changes that can be seen with certain conditions or diseases.