



THE BIRD CLINIC VETERINARY CORPORATION

PET BIRDS AND CANCER RISK

In 1992 there was a great deal of press regarding a link between bird ownership and lung cancer because of studies published in the *British Medical Journal* and then in **USA Today** (October 23, 1992) which stated that the risk of lung cancer doubles in people exposed to pet birds for up to 10 years and triples in people exposed for more than 10 years.

A Berkeley research team wrote a rebuttal in which they discussed that there were limited controlled studies to have established any clear link between bird ownership and lung cancer. The major cause of lung cancer is smoking: fully 87% of all documented cases are attributed to cigarettes. But, that leaves 13% of lung cancer cases unexplained. Researchers have for some time been investigating other possible culprits, such as diet, occupational exposures, and radiation. European studies have been small and the evidence far from clear. Most of the cancer patients in the published study were smokers, and it could be that smoking and exposure to birds interact to raise the risk. There were no controls for the number of birds per household and professional bird keepers may be at higher risk, but owning one bird doesn't affect you. The Berkeley team also discovered that the funding for the study was from the tobacco industry. Data in 2003 data showed that birds' risk of respiratory disease from secondhand cigarette smoke equals or exceeds the proven risks in humans.

In conclusion, if you don't smoke but have a pet bird, **your risk is probably very low.** If you smoke and have a bird, keep the bird and toss the cigarettes.

Steps you can take to mitigate any POSSIBLE risk for you and your pet bird:

- **Bathe your bird *at least* twice weekly**
- **Do not keep birds in your bedroom**
- **Change cage papers/bedding daily if possible**
- **"Air out" your home in nice weather**
- **Switch to non-aerosol cleaning products and avoid using any spray chemicals**
- **Buy and use a quality, HEPA air filter. In addition to doing an excellent job capturing feather dust/down, these filters will reduce smog, household dust, mold, yeast and other allergens and toxins-all of which are unhealthy for you and your bird.**

**AIR FILTERS WILL DRAMATICALLY REDUCE FEATHER
DUST IN THE HOME!!**

This publication is part of The BIRD C News™ series to help educate bird owners. Produced by The BIRD Clinic Veterinary Corporation
2525 N. Grand Avenue, Suite R, Santa Ana, CA 92705 714-633-2910. www.thebirdclinic.net May be reproduced with permission only.

Revised 6/03