CDC Features

Keeping Backyard Chickens and Other Poultry

ALERT: Multistate Outbreaks of *Salmonella* Infections linked to Backyard Poultry

CDC and many states are investigating several outbreaks of *Salmonella* infections linked to contact with backyard poultry. These outbreaks are a reminder to always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching chickens, ducklings, and anything in their environment.

Backyard chickens and other poultry (ducks, turkeys) can carry germs like *Salmonella*. After you touch a bird, or anything in the area where birds live and roam, wash your hands so you don’t get sick!

Owning backyard chickens and other poultry can be a great experience. However, people have gotten sick with *Salmonella* from handling poultry or items in the area where they live and roam. Even handling baby birds displayed at stores or exhibits can spread *Salmonella* infections to people.

There Are Many Ways You Can Get *Salmonella* from Poultry

Poultry might have *Salmonella* germs in their droppings and on their bodies (feathers, feet, and beaks), even when they appear healthy and clean. The germs can get on cages, coops, feed and water dishes, hay, plants, and soil in the area where the birds live and roam. Germs also can get on the hands, shoes, and clothes of people who handle or care for poultry.

People can be infected with *Salmonella* germs when they put their hands or equipment that has been in contact with poultry, in or around their mouth. Children younger than 5 years are more likely to get sick because their immune systems are still developing, and they are more likely to put their fingers and other objects into their mouths.

People can also get sick without actually touching a bird. Germs on your hands can spread easily to other people or surfaces. That’s why it’s important to wash hands immediately with soap and water after touching poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam.

Sometimes, people can become so sick from a *Salmonella* infection that they have to go to the hospital. Serious *Salmonella* infections are more likely to occur in people in these groups:

- Children younger than 5 years
- Adults older than 65 years
- People with immune systems weakened from a medical condition, such as diabetes, liver or kidney disease, and cancer or its treatment
Wash Your Hands and Take Other Steps to Reduce Yours Chances of Getting *Salmonella*

- Always **wash your hands** with soap and water right after touching backyard poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam.
  - Adults should supervise handwashing by young children.
  - Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.
- Don't let backyard poultry inside the house, especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored.
- Set aside a pair of shoes to wear while taking care of poultry and keep those shoes outside of the house.
- Children younger than 5, adults older than 65, and people with weakened immune systems shouldn't handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other poultry.
- Poultry should not be kept in daycares, preschools, hospitals, or nursing homes.
- Don't eat or drink where poultry live or roam.
- Don't kiss backyard poultry, or snuggle them and then touch your face or mouth.
- Stay outdoors when cleaning any equipment or materials used to raise or care for poultry, such as cages or feed or water containers.
- Buy backyard poultry from hatcheries that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Poultry Improvement Plan (USDA-NPIP) U.S. voluntary *Salmonella Monitoring Program* [279 KB]. This program is intended to reduce *Salmonella* in baby poultry in the hatchery, which can help prevent the spread of illness from poultry to people.

Chickens and other poultry may carry bacteria such as *Salmonella* that can get inside of eggs before the shells are formed. Eggs can also become contaminated from poultry droppings.

**Safe Handling Tips for Eggs from Backyard Poultry**

Egg shells may become contaminated with *Salmonella* from poultry droppings (poop) or the area where they are laid. To keep your family healthy, follow the tips below when collecting and handling eggs from a backyard flock:
- Always wash your hands with soap and water right after handling eggs, chickens, or anything in their environment.
- Maintain a clean coop. Cleaning the coop, floor, nests and perches regularly will help to keep eggs clean.
- Collect eggs often. Eggs that spend more time in the nest can get more poop on them, or break. Throw away cracked eggs.
- Clean eggs that have dirt and debris with fine sandpaper, a brush, or cloth. Don't wash eggs, because colder water can pull *Salmonella* on the egg shell into the egg.
- Refrigerate eggs after collecting them.
- Cook eggs thoroughly so that yolks are not runny and whites are firm. Raw and undercooked eggs may contain *Salmonella* bacteria that can make you sick.
- Know local regulations for selling eggs. If you sell eggs, follow local licensing requirements.

Learn more about *Salmonella* and Eggs.

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**Avian Flu**

Poultry also can carry avian influenza (flu) viruses. Avian flu very rarely makes people sick. Learn more about avian flu and steps you can take to protect yourself.

**Symptoms of *Salmonella* Infection**

*Salmonella* germs can make people sick with:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Abdominal cramps

CDC's *Salmonella* website has more information about *Salmonella* infections and the signs of a severe infection.

Call your child's doctor if your child has:

- Diarrhea that doesn't improve after 1 day
- Vomiting lasting more than 12 hours for infants, 1 day for children younger than age 2, or 2 days for other children
- Signs of dehydration, including not urinating in 3 or more hours, dry mouth or tongue, or cries without tears
- Fever higher than 102 °F (39 °C)
- Bloody stools

Call your doctor if you have:

- Diarrhea that doesn't improve after 2 days
- Vomiting lasting more than 2 days
- Signs of dehydration, including little or no urination, excessive thirst, a very dry mouth, dizziness or lightheadedness, or very dark urine
- Fever higher than 102 °F (39 °C)
- Bloody stools
Rules About Owning Live Poultry Depend on Where You Live

Rules for poultry ownership vary by city, county, and state. Check with your local government to know the rules for where you live.

More Information

- Healthy Pets Healthy People: Backyard Poultry
- US Outbreaks Related to Poultry
- Disease Detectives at Work—Detecting *Salmonella* Infections from Backyard Flocks
- United States Department of Agriculture’s Biosecurity for Birds (keeping your birds healthy) [PDF]
- Avian Influenza A Virus Infections in Humans

Graphics:

- Healthy Families and Flocks
- Always wash your hands around poultry [PDF]
- How Infected Backyard Poultry Could Spread Bird Flu to People [PDF] (555 KB)

Podcasts:

- CDC Kidstastics Podcast: Wash Your Hands [0:51 seconds]
- CDC Radio: Hand Washing PSA [0:29 seconds]

Selected Publications:

- Environmental Investigation of a Multistate Salmonellosis Outbreak Linked to Live Backyard Poultry from a Mail-Order Hatchery — Michigan, 2018
- Outbreaks of Human *Salmonella* Infections Associated with Live Poultry, United States, 1990-2014
- Backyard Poultry Flocks and Salmonellosis: A Recurring, Yet Preventable Public Health Challenge [PDF]
- Multistate Outbreak of Human *Salmonella* Infections Linked to Live Poultry from a Mail-Order Hatchery in Ohio — February-October 2014
- Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2017 [PDF]