



Peep, chirp, quack! Live poultry can carry *Salmonella*

DENVER— With spring comes increased interest in baby birds, but the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment warns *Salmonella* infection can result from handling live poultry, poultry cages and bedding. Parents and caregivers should keep children 5 years of age and younger from handling young birds, such as chicks, ducklings, goslings and baby turkeys.

“As adorable as baby chicks and ducklings look, they are not good pets for young children because of the health risk associated with handling them,” said Alicia Cronquist, department epidemiologist.

Last year, the department investigated three outbreaks of *Salmonella* infection that were associated with exposure to baby birds. Most cases were among children under 5 years of age, and five children were hospitalized. Children are at greater risk of illness because their immune systems are still developing, they are more likely to put their fingers or other items in their mouths, and they are less likely than adults to wash their hands.

Salmonella infection is usually known as a foodborne illness, but backyard flocks may have *Salmonella* germs in their droppings and on their feathers, feet and beaks, even when they appear healthy and clean. While it usually doesn't make the birds sick, *Salmonella* can cause serious illness when it is passed to people.

Follow these simple steps to stay healthy:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching live poultry or anything in the area where live poultry live and roam. Adults should supervise hand-washing for young children.
- Clean any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for live poultry outside the house, such as cages and feed and water containers.
- Never bring live poultry inside the house.

Salmonella infection symptoms usually begin one to three days after exposure and include diarrhea, fever and stomach pain. Illness typically lasts four to seven days, and most people recover without medical treatment. However, in some people, the symptoms may be so severe that treatment or hospitalization is needed. Infants, elderly people and those with weakened immune systems are more likely than others to develop severe illness. When severe infection

occurs, *Salmonella* may spread from the intestines to the bloodstream and then to other places in the body. It can cause death unless the person is treated promptly with antibiotics.

According to the CDC, more than 50 outbreaks of *Salmonella* infections linked to live poultry have been reported since 1990. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SalmonellaBabyBirds> for more information. The website also features a podcast on why parents should think twice before giving children baby chicks for Easter.