



Baby Chicks Can Be a Source of Salmonella

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BURLINGTON - Soft and cute baby chicks and ducklings are offered for sale online and in feed stores this time of year and raising chicks can be rewarding, but live poultry (chicks, chickens, ducks, ducklings, geese, turkeys) can also be a source of human Salmonella infections, especially for children.

Since 1990, more than 35 outbreaks of human Salmonella infections associated with live poultry have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These outbreaks included more than 1,300 illnesses, many of them in young children.

Interest in raising chickens has increased over the years and so have the number of outbreaks reported. In 2012, eight outbreaks were investigated nationally, the most ever in a year.

Two Vermonters became sick as a result of two of those outbreaks.

“When live baby poultry carry Salmonella they don’t appear to be sick, but they can still spread germs to people,” said Erica Berl, an infectious disease epidemiologist with the Vermont Department of Health. “Live poultry may have Salmonella bacteria in their droppings and on their bodies (feathers, feet, and beaks) even when they appear healthy and clean.”

The germs can also get on cages, coops and other objects in the area where birds live and roam. People can be exposed to Salmonella by holding, cuddling or kissing the birds and by touching objects where the birds live, such as cages or feed and water bowls. People become infected with Salmonella when they touch something that is contaminated with Salmonella bacteria and then touch their mouth or eat with their hands.

Illness from Salmonella typically causes diarrhea, vomiting, fever and abdominal cramps. Illness can be severe and require hospitalization. Young children, elderly people, and those with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop severe illness.

Young children are especially at risk for illness because their immune systems are still developing and they are more likely to put their fingers or other items into their mouths.

To reduce the risk of Salmonella infection from live poultry:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching live baby poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available. Supervise hand washing for young children.
- Don't let younger children, especially those less than 5 years of age, handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry.
- Don't snuggle or kiss the birds and touch your mouth.
- Don't eat or drink in the area where the birds live or roam.
- Keep live poultry outside. Don't let live baby poultry inside the house, in bathrooms, or especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served or stored, such as kitchens or outdoor patios.
- Don't clean any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for live poultry (such as cages or feed or water containers) inside the house.
- Don't give live baby poultry as gifts to young children.

For more information about Salmonella, visit healthvermont.gov. For more information on poultry management, contact the Animal Health Office at the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (802)828-2421.

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