



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

NEWS RELEASE

Office of Communications
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

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Parents reminded that baby chicks and ducks can carry Salmonella

DENVER— As spring approaches, state epidemiologists are warning parents and caregivers to keep children 5 years of age and younger from handling young birds, such as chicks and ducklings, as they pose a health risk from Salmonella bacteria. Salmonellosis is a common food-borne illness, but it also can be spread to people by direct contact with animals that carry the bacteria, or from contact with the animal environments, like the cages or bedding.

“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, an epidemiologist from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Salmonellosis outbreaks from chicks and ducklings often occur during the spring as the demand rises for baby birds as gifts and for backyard use to raise them for meat and eggs. In past years, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s Disease Control and Environmental Epidemiology Division has investigated outbreaks of Salmonella infection that were associated with exposure to baby birds. Most cases were among children under 5 years of age. In addition, this week the CDC issued a report on a 2011 Salmonella outbreak in other states that was caused by handling baby birds. However, simple steps after handling these birds, such as frequent hand washing, can prevent illness, health officials said.

Cronquist warned, “Children are particularly at risk of illness because they are less likely to wash their hands and have more frequent hand-to-mouth contact than adults.”

Other individuals at high risk of severe illness include the elderly and people with weakened immune systems, she said.

Cronquist provided the following tips to prevent exposure to Salmonella:

- Wash your hands and children’s hands with soap and water immediately after touching any chicks, ducklings or other animals. If soap and water are unavailable, alcohol-based hand wipes and gel sanitizers may be used.
- Do not purchase chicks, ducklings or other baby birds as pets for children under age 5 or for people with weakened immune systems.
- Supervise children when handling baby birds. Do not allow children to o nuzzle or kiss chicks and ducklings;
 - touch their mouths with their hands after handling baby birds;
 - eat and drink before washing their hands thoroughly.
- Keep chicks, ducklings and other baby birds in a designated area away from family living spaces.
- If an adult or child has a high fever, severe diarrhea or other symptoms after handling baby birds, contact a health care provider.

Symptoms

Cronquist said Salmonella infection symptoms usually begin about one to three days after exposure and include diarrhea, fever and stomach pain. Illness usually lasts four to seven days, and most people will recover without medical treatment. However, in some people the symptoms may be so severe that treatment or hospitalization is needed.

For more information about Salmonella and animals, visit www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/birds.htm or call your local health department.