

Got chickens? What you need to know about backyard poultry

They can bring more than eggs into your home if you're not careful

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Backyard poultry are becoming popular with both rural and not so rural families. This can be an educational opportunity for families as well as a way to have fresh eggs. But chicken and other poultry can carry germs that can make people sick.

Last year backyard poultry was linked to over 1,000 people in 49 states becoming infected with different strains of salmonella. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 175 people were hospitalized and two people died. Most of those who were ill were children younger than 5. Poultry can carry the bacteria and not appear sick themselves.

Let's talk a little about salmonella. This pathogen is found in the gastrointestinal system of both humans and animals. It can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps and fever lasting a few days to a week. Usually the first symptoms of salmonella start six to 72 hours after contact. Children, the elderly and people who have a chronic illness are the most easily infected due to weaker immune systems.

The foods most often associated with salmonella are chicken, eggs and fresh produce. It has also been found in foods like spices and peanut butter.

You may remember about 10 years ago that a large amount of peanut butter was recalled due to salmonella contamination that they found was linked to birds in the processing plant. Salmonella has also been linked to live animals and pets like lizards and turtles.



Backyard farmers need to practice safe and smart hygiene to keep themselves and their feathered friends healthy and safe. [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

Salmonella in food is very hardy, so it requires a high cooking temperature to destroy. Chicken should be cooked to 165 degrees to destroy the salmonella pathogens. Eggs should be cooked to at least 145 degrees. (Note: the yolks of eggs will not be runny at this temperature.)

If you have a flock of chickens, the CDC offers these recommendations:

- Wash your hands with soap and water right after touching backyard poultry and adults should supervise handwashing by young children if they come in contact with the chickens and chicken equipment.
- Children under 5 (and adults over 65 and those with chronic illnesses) should avoid handling chicks, ducklings or other poultry because their bodies may not have the ability to resist infection.
- Children should not be allowed to play or eat in areas where the poultry roam.
- Keep other household pets away from the chicken area — they may carry the bacteria to the family and home.
- Don't kiss or snuggle backyard poultry.

- Keep chickens out of the garden. Fresh chicken droppings can be a risk of contamination to fresh produce.
- Don't let the poultry in your house.
- Keep shoes used while taking care of poultry outside of the house.
- Wash the chicken's equipment outside and not in the kitchen with the people food and dishes.

All of this advice should be kept in mind if you're considering giving your child a cute and cuddly baby chicken or duckling as a pet. In addition to the health concerns, you need to remember that like any other pet or animal they grow up and it's a lifetime commitment. Also, chickens are considered livestock and there may be local zoning laws against backyard poultry.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/farm-animals/backyard-poultry.html>

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