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General questions: Media contact: Jodi Sherwood, 503-480-4982

Technical questions: Technical contact: Emilio DeBess, DVM, MPH, state public health veterinarian, 971-673-1027

Baby chicks may pose a *Salmonella* threat; proper handling advised

Public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) are reminding Oregonians that baby fowl may carry *Salmonella*.

Chicks, ducklings and other young fowl may not be appropriate pets for children younger than 5 years or for persons with a weakened immune system, said Emilio DeBess, D.V.M., public health veterinarian in DHS. "They are fuzzy, cute, and irresistible to pick-up and hold but they can also be loaded with *Salmonella*."

Salmonella poisoning from baby poultry purchased as pets or for backyard flocks represents an ongoing public health concern and causes multiple hospitalizations each year. Two cases have been identified in Oregon over the past few weeks; both had contact with young poultry. Both patients are recovering.

Though chicks, ducklings and goslings may not appear dirty, they could carry feces on their feet, feathers and beaks. Poultry should always be housed outside because of the risk of tracking the infection into the household environment.

To reduce the risk of *Salmonella* infection, the Oregon Public Health Division recommends thorough hand washing with soap and warm water for anyone who enters an area that houses poultry or who handles any baby chicks, ducks or other fowl. Children should be supervised so they do not nuzzle or kiss the animals.

Symptoms of *Salmonella* usually begin with fever, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. Other symptoms may include vomiting, nausea, chills, headache and stomach cramps. Most people recover well; however, infants, children, the elderly and those

with a lowered immune system are more likely to experience severe illness that may require further treatment or hospitalization.