

News release

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Don't kiss the chicks: Advice from Oregon Public Health officials ***Salmonella can spread from baby chicks and ducklings to people***

With spring here and the Easter holiday approaching, Oregon Public Health officials are urging parents to protect their children from potential *Salmonella* infection caused by handling baby poultry, such as chicks and ducklings. Baby chicks are cute, soft and cuddly. Handling them, however, could cause illness.

"I know baby chicks and ducklings are cute and you may want to pick them up. Never nuzzle or kiss chicks or ducklings. *Salmonella* bacteria are easily spread from birds to humans," said Emilio DeBess, D.V.M., M.P.V.M., state public health veterinarian for the Oregon Public Health Division, Oregon Health Authority. "Chicks and ducklings may not be an appropriate gift for children younger than 5 or for people with weakened immune systems," he said.

A recent case of salmonellosis in a child in Deschutes County has been linked to baby chicks that had been kept inside a home, which led to cross-contamination.

Many chicks carry *Salmonella* bacteria in their intestinal tract and can shed these bacteria in their feces. *Salmonella* bacteria may not cause any illness in chicks, but can cause serious illness in people, especially children and immune-compromised people.

Most *Salmonella* infections in humans result in a mild, self-limiting illness characterized by diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. However, the infection can spread to the bloodstream, leading to severe and sometimes fatal illness.

To prevent the spread of *Salmonella* bacteria from baby birds, people should take the following precautions:

- Always wash your hands with hot, soapy water after handling cages, equipment and the stool of birds.
- Keep the birds outside.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling birds, cages or bird equipment.
- Follow instructions from your veterinarian concerning proper diet and environment for your chicks. Healthy chicks and ducklings living in proper environments are less likely to shed *Salmonella* bacteria.

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The Oregon Health Authority is at the forefront of lowering and containing costs, improving quality and increasing access to health care in order to improve the lifelong health of Oregonians.