

Salmonella and Backyard Chickens

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Outbreaks in humans of *Salmonella* infection, or salmonellosis, linked to live poultry in backyard flocks continue to occur. In an outbreak occurring during 2014, the two types of *Salmonella* involved are *Salmonella* Infantis and *Salmonella* Newport. As of May 27, 2014, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov) (CDC) reported that 126 people from 26 states had been infected. Although 35 percent of the infected people required hospitalization, no deaths were reported. Signs of salmonellosis in humans include diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal cramps. In most cases, recovery is quick, with no lasting effects.

Investigations to trace the origins of the 2014 outbreak identified Mt. Healthy Hatcheries in Ohio as the source of the infected chicks and ducklings. Mt. Healthy Hatcheries has been associated with multiple outbreaks of salmonellosis in the past, including outbreaks in 2012 and 2013.

People raising backyard flocks, as well as the general public, should understand that salmonellosis can result from many animal sources, including reptiles, turtles, and rodents. In fact, the likelihood of getting salmonellosis is greater with other pets than with poultry. Because animals infected with *Salmonella* can appear healthy, care should be taken when handling any animal.

Common Questions

How do people get salmonellosis from chicks?

Poultry can have *Salmonella* in their manure and on their feathers, feet, and beaks. Yet they may appear completely healthy and clean. Also, *Salmonella* can get on housing, equipment, bedding, and soil in the area where the birds are kept. The bacteria can be transferred to the hands, shoes, and clothing of those who handle the birds or work or play where the birds have been. People become infected when they put contaminated hands or items in or around their mouths.

I received chicks from Mt. Healthy Hatcheries. What should I do?

Mt. Healthy Hatcheries ships thousands of chicks each week from a variety of breeder flocks. The majority of the chicks they ship are not infected, so your chicks may be fine. If you are concerned, you can euthanize the flock and start fresh. Regardless of where you obtained your chicks, however, using safe handling practices is imperative.

All chicks have the potential to be infected with different types of *Salmonella*. Chicks carry *Salmonella* in their digestive tracts, and the bacteria are shed with the chicks' manure. As with other animals infected with *Salmonella*, infected chicks may appear healthy and clean and show no signs of illness. As a result, contact with live poultry and their environment requires attention to sanitation. The following safe practices should be followed when handling any poultry:

- Wash your hands after touching poultry or equipment in their surroundings, using proper hand-washing techniques. Proper hand-washing techniques include using *soap* and *warm, running water*; *rubbing* your hands vigorously with soap and water for 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the alphabet song); *washing* the backs of your hands, your wrists, between your fingers, and under your fingernails; *rinsing* well; *drying* thoroughly with a paper towel; and *turning off* water faucets with your elbow or a paper towel.
- If you do not have access to a hand-washing facility, use hand sanitizer until you are able to wash your hands.
- Ensure that a child handling chicks keeps his or her hands away from the face, especially the mouth and eyes.
- Do not snuggle or kiss chicks.
- Do not let poultry inside the house or in outdoor-living spaces, especially in areas where food and drink are prepared, served, or stored. Such areas include kitchens and outdoor patios.
- Do not clean poultry equipment in areas where food and drink are prepared, such as a kitchen sink. It is better to wash such equipment outside the house.

Why is Mt. Healthy Hatcheries still open and allowed to sell chicks?

Since the outbreak was traced back to the facility, Mt. Healthy Hatcheries has worked with personnel from the US Department of Agriculture's [National Poultry Improvement Plan](#) (NPIP) program to clean up the hatchery. The NPIP program has a [Best Management Practices Handbook](#) for the mitigation of *Salmonella* contamination at poultry hatcheries. Mt. Healthy Hatcheries does not maintain breeder flocks for all the breeds of chicks they sell. Instead, like most large hatcheries, they obtain many of their hatching eggs from contracted sources. They have suspended purchases of hatching eggs from outside suppliers until contaminated breeder flocks can be identified.

For More Information

CDC [Advice to Consumers](#)

CDC [Publications and Brochures](#)

[Safe Handling of Chicks](#) (University of Kentucky)

Contributor

Dr. Jacquie Jacob, University of Kentucky, jacquie.jacob@uky.edu

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