

# **Backyard poultry producers should take precautions against salmonella**

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Backyard egg production has grown in popularity over the past several years, but producers should be aware of the risk of salmonella contamination. Credit: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo by Adam Russell

Exposure to salmonella from live poultry can be prevented if producers take the necessary precautions, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service specialist.

The popularity of backyard poultry flocks has increased over the last several years, but recent outbreaks of [salmonella](#) highlight the need for public education about the risks to small producers, said Craig Coufal, AgriLife Extension poultry specialist, College Station.

In late July, the Centers for Disease Control reported 611 cases of salmonella infections, including one death and 138 hospitalizations. According to the CDC, 32 percent of those infected were children 5-years-old or younger.

Epidemiologic, traceback, and laboratory findings linked the outbreaks to contact with [live poultry](#), such as chicks and ducklings, from multiple hatcheries and affected backyard flocks, according to the CDC.

Most chickens carry some form of the more than 2,000 types of salmonella, Coufal said. It's a naturally occurring part of their microbial flora. Birds are carriers so they typically don't show signs of the bacteria.

Despite the presence of salmonella on poultry, residents with backyard flocks for egg and meat production can greatly reduce the probability of infection by taking precautions, Coufal said. Petting or holding live [birds](#)

, handling eggs or working in areas frequented by birds, such as the coop, can expose people to salmonella.

In most cases, soap and warm water is the solution, Coufal said.

"It's really a hygiene issue," he said. "Anytime you're in contact with live birds or eggs there's a chance for transmission of salmonella. The key is to wash your hands and take precautions to prevent cross contamination to your mouth, the kitchen or food."



Backyard producers should be aware that handling poultry, such as chickens and ducks or their eggs can expose them to salmonella. Practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands with warm water and soap is the best protection from the bacteria. Credit: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service photo by Adam Russell

Coufal said the high percentage of young children exposed to salmonella during the outbreak highlights how the bacteria can be spread.

"Kids love to play with baby chicks and ducklings," he said. "If they then put their fingers in their mouths or touch food without washing their hands, they are putting the bacteria directly into their system, thus possibly resulting in illness."

Backyard producers can also protect flocks from exposure to salmonella and other bacteria and viruses by practicing good biosecurity, Coufal said.

Producers shouldn't share equipment or materials with other producers, he said. If sharing equipment, such as a coop, is necessary, it should be cleaned thoroughly with a bleach-based cleaner.

Simply visiting a neighbor's backyard production area could lead to exposure of pathogens if precautions are not taken to prevent transmission, such as changing shoes or clothes.

Coufal also recommends backyard producers purchase their chicks, ducklings and other fowl from reputable sources.

"When you buy birds at a flea market or in the want ads you really don't know where they are coming from," he said. "There are no assurances of testing for diseases or the health status of the bird."

Coufal recommends purchasing birds from hatcheries or breeders that have certification through the National Poultry Improvement Plan. NPIP certification ensures birds are from healthy breeder flocks tested for severe diseases. However, NPIP certification does not guarantee birds are completely free of salmonella.

"There is nothing wrong with having a backyard flock," Coufal said. "But people do need to be aware of the potential health risks and the ways to avoid cross contamination from occurring."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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