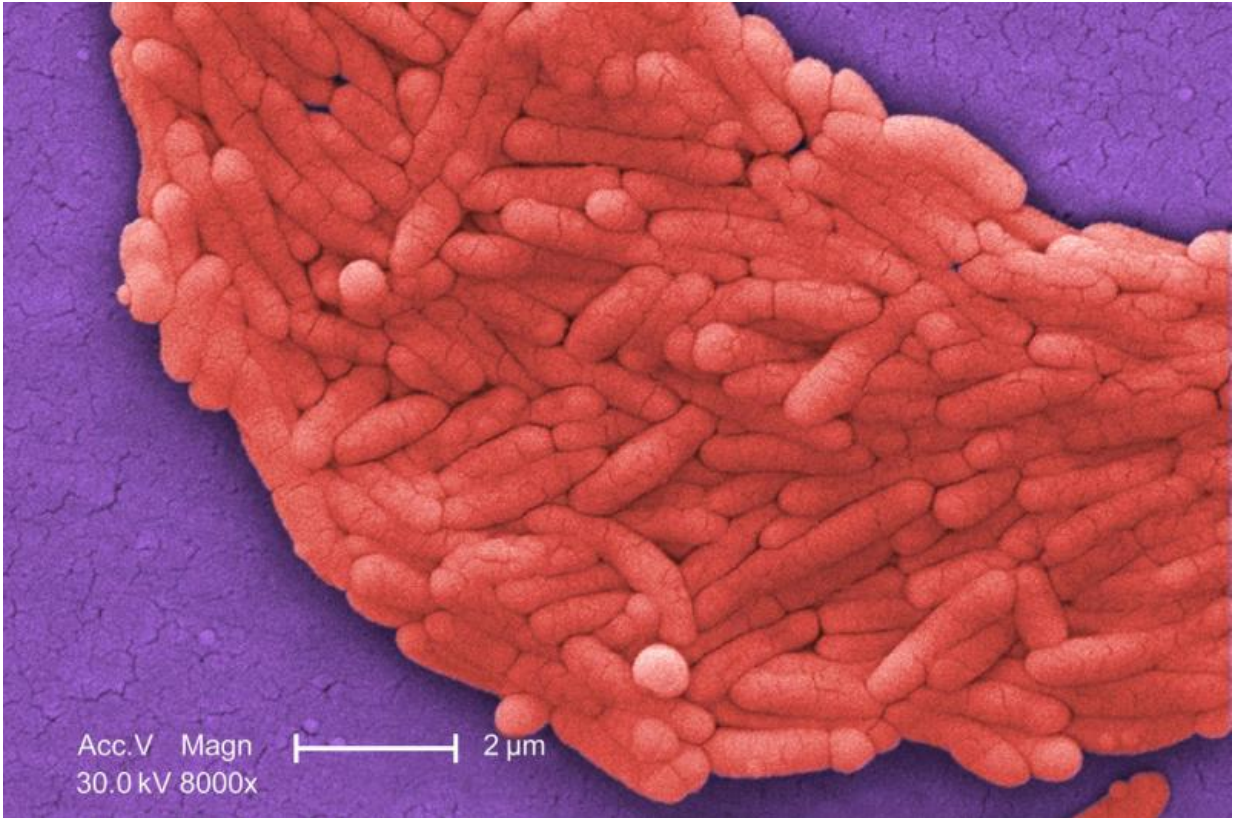


Backyard poultry present salmonella risk

June 12 2017



Salmonella forms a biofilm. Credit: CDC

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this spring reports that there are eight ongoing outbreaks of salmonella in 47 states linked to backyard poultry in the United States. As of May 13, 71 people had been hospitalized—36 percent of those infected are children under the age of 5. Fortunately, no deaths have been reported.

"More and more people are raising backyard chickens, and they need to understand proper techniques for handling birds and equipment," said Phillip Clauer, senior instructor and extension specialist, College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State.

Clauer noted that because young poultry are cute, soft and enjoyable to handle, people often forget that they could be infected with [salmonella bacteria](#). Young children, older adults and people with weakened immune systems, he said, are especially at risk.

Eva Wallner-Pendleton, poultry veterinarian at the Animal Diagnostic Lab at Penn State, added that toddlers are particularly vulnerable because they explore the world with their mouths.

"People often have the mistaken idea that backyard birds and their [eggs](#) are free from salmonella, but a recent study at Penn State showed a small percentage of positive eggs exist even in this sector," said Wallner-Pendleton. "In fact, any poultry can be carriers of salmonella, and they usually have no outward symptoms of disease."

Eggs, too, can make people sick, she said. "Certain salmonella, such as [salmonella enteritidis](#), can be shed directly into eggs, and unless eggs are thoroughly cooked, they can potentially make people sick."

More and more people are raising backyard chickens, and they need to understand proper techniques for handling birds and equipment, according to Penn State Extension poultry experts.

Image: Alexandra Seinet on Unsplash

In humans, infection with salmonella may cause diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. Most patients recover without medical treatment; however, a few may require hospitalization.

Safe handling practices are the key to avoiding [salmonella infection](#). Clauer and Wallner-Pendleton offer several tips for staying safe:

- Wash hands thoroughly anytime poultry or anything that has been in contact with the birds' environment are handled.
- Parents should ensure that children wash hands promptly after handling poultry.
- Do not hold birds near the face or kiss them.
- Keep poultry out of homes and living areas. They cannot be bathroom trained.
- Do not eat and drink when working with birds or in their pens.
- If poultry have access to gardens, properly wash any produce before eating.
- Cook all eggs completely before consuming.
- Buy birds from hatcheries that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Poultry Improvement Plan (USDA-NPIP); however, be aware that not all hatcheries test their breeding flocks or hatching eggs for salmonella. Only those participating in a salmonella monitored program do so. The NPIP website contains a directory for each state and lists the NPIP program in which the various hatcheries participate.
- Clean drop pans daily and pens with pine shavings at least monthly to reduce contamination.
- Rodents often harbor salmonella, which can then infect the birds if rodents contaminate their food. Controlling rodents is very important for reducing salmonella in the [birds'](#) environment.
- Keep in mind that shoes worn in pens can become contaminated. Having dedicated shoes or over-boots when entering the pens that can be removed when leaving can help reduce tracking [salmonella](#) as well as other diseases that are spread in the droppings.

More information: Information about keeping backyard poultry

flocks, including safe handling practices, is available here:
[extension.psu.edu/animals/poul ... small-poultry-flocks](https://extension.psu.edu/animals/poul...small-poultry-flocks)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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