

Parents tending backyard poultry can pass along dangerous salmonella to infants

April 11 2024, by Ernie Mundell



A days-old newborn in Oregon was sickened with salmonella that may have been transmitted from parents who tended infected poultry located 150 miles away, a new report finds. The work is [published](#) in the journal *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has long warned of the danger of salmonella bacterial illnesses being transmitted from poultry to babies and children. However, the new study suggests that infection can happen even without direct contact between a child and infected birds.

"Even in the absence of direct exposure, [backyard poultry](#) might present a risk for salmonellosis to newborns and infants," concluded a team led by Stephen Ladd-Wilson, of the Oregon Health Authority.

The case outlined by the Oregon team began four days after the birth last October of a healthy baby boy. Mom and baby had been discharged to a relative's home located close to the hospital.

However, at just 5 days of age, the newborn was brought to a second hospital "with bloody stools and lethargy," the researchers reported.

Stool tests confirmed infection with a strain of the Salmonella bacterium, but since the baby was exclusively breast-fed, the source of his infection was unclear.

However, it emerged that one month before their son's birth, his parents bought chicks and began raising a small flock of backyard poultry at their home, which was located over 150 miles away from where the newborn was living at the time of his illness.

Both Mom and Dad had stayed with the newborn at the relative's home, and the baby had not traveled with them to their backyard poultry pen. However, lab analysis of salmonella strains found in the family's poultry flock were a very close match for the strain that had infected the baby.

"It is possible that one of the parents was asymptotically shedding the organism and exposed the newborn during or after birth," Ladd-Wilson's group theorized.

It's also possible that the baby contracted the bacterium after touching his parent's clothes or other objects that might have contained traces of salmonella, the team said.

They say the case highlights the need for strict hygiene when caring for poultry, especially if families include infants "whose intestinal flora and immune systems are still developing."

Families may want to avoid raising backyard chickens or ducks altogether if very [young children](#) are in the home, Ladd-Wilson's group said.

According to the CDC, during the first 10 months of 2023 there were at least 1,072 cases of backyard poultry-associated [salmonella](#) illness recorded in 48 states and Puerto Rico, including 247 cases that required hospitalization.

More information: Stephen G. Ladd-Wilson et al, Notes from the Field: Neonatal Salmonellosis Associated with Backyard Poultry — Oregon, November 2023, *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (2024). [DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7314a6](https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7314a6)

Find out more about salmonella illness at the [Mayo Clinic](#).

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