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TO: Grant County Media

FOR INFORMATION CONTACTHeather Massart, Public Information Officer
Phone: 509-766-7960 ext. 16Amber McCoy, RS, Environmental Health Specialist
Phone: 509-766-7960 ext. 14

Don't Play Chicken With Your Health

Chicks and backyard poultry pose risk for Salmonella



GRANT COUNTY, WA – Spring has Sprung and Chicks are in! Live poultry such as chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys, and especially baby poultry (chicks and ducklings), often carry harmful germs called *Salmonella*. As more people around the country and in Grant County are choosing to keep live poultry as part of a greener, healthier lifestyle they are also putting themselves at greater risk of coming into contact with *Salmonella*. While many people enjoy the benefits of backyard chickens and other poultry, it is important to consider the risk of illness, especially for children, which can result from handling, cuddling, or kissing live poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam.

How do people get infected with *Salmonella* from chicks and other live poultry?

Salmonella is a type of germ that naturally lives in the intestines of poultry and many other animals. Even organically fed poultry can have *Salmonella*. Live poultry may have *Salmonella* germs in their droppings and on their bodies (feathers, feet, and beaks) even when they appear healthy and clean. The germs can also get on cages, coops, feed and water dishes, hay, plants, and soil in the area where the birds live and roam. Additionally, the germs can be found on the hands, shoes and clothing of those who handle the birds or work or play where they live and roam. People can become sick when *Salmonella* germs get into their mouths.

Who is at risk for *Salmonella*?

Though anyone can get *Salmonella* infection, children are especially at risk of becoming sick because their immune systems are still developing. Children are also less likely to wash their hands, and often put their hands in their mouths. Because of this, it is recommended that children under age 5 not touch chicks, ducklings or other live poultry. Others at increased risk for *Salmonella* infection are the elderly, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.

What are the signs and symptoms of *Salmonella*?

Salmonella doesn't usually make the birds sick; however it can cause serious illness when it is passed to people. It most commonly causes diarrhea, fever, and stomach pain starting 1 to 3 days after

coming into contact with the germ. Other symptoms might be nausea, chills, headaches, or general achy feeling. Young children, the elderly, and people with weak immune systems may become severely sick and occasionally, infections are so severe that people have to see a doctor or be hospitalized.

How to reduce the risk of *Salmonella* from live poultry:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water right after touching live poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available. Adults should supervise hand washing for young children.
- Shoes worn in chicken coops and other places where live poultry live and roam should be taken off before entering the house. Wash hands after removing soiled clothes and shoes.
- If you collect eggs for eating, cook them until the white and the yolk are firm (145°F), as *Salmonella* can pass from healthy looking hens into the interior of normal looking eggs. Eggs that will not be cooked right away should be refrigerated promptly in a separate container and always wash hands after handling eggs.
- If you have free-roaming live poultry, assume where they live and roam is contaminated.
- Don't let children younger than 5 years of age, older adults, or people with weak immune systems handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry.
- Don't let children snuggle, kiss or touch chicks with their mouths.
- Don't eat or drink in the areas where the birds live or roam.
- Don't let chicks or live poultry inside the house, in bathrooms, and especially in areas where food is prepared, served, or stored, such as kitchens or outdoor patios.
- Don't clean any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for live poultry, such as cages or feed or water containers, inside the house.



For more information about keeping backyard poultry, go to:

www.cdc.gov/features/SalmonellaPoultry/

For more information about *Salmonella* and baby poultry, go to:

www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/AnimalTransmittedDiseases/SalmonellafromChicksandDucklings

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