



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH & WELFARE**

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**NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Date: April 2, 2012**

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## **Baby Fowl Can be Dangerous Easter Gifts**

Baby chicks and ducklings may look like cute Easter gifts, but the young fowl can be dangerous for children. State health officials are warning Idahoans to resist the temptation to purchase them as holiday presents.

"Baby chicks and ducklings, often advertised as Easter gifts, pose a real health risk for young children and those with weakened immune systems," says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, deputy state epidemiologist for the Division of Public Health. "These birds may appear healthy, but they can carry strains of *Salmonella* and other bacteria that can cause serious illness in people."

In the past, baby chicks have been identified as sources of *Salmonella* in residents of Idaho and other states. Annually people from across the country are sickened from contact with young chicks; many of the infections are documented around the Easter holiday or associated with backyard poultry production.

People, especially children, can be exposed to the *Salmonella* bacteria by holding, cuddling or kissing the apparently healthy birds. Children are most susceptible to infection by *Salmonella* from chicks because they are more likely to put their fingers in their mouths after animal contact and because their immune systems are still developing. Persons with HIV/AIDS, or who are pregnant, elderly, or with other conditions that weaken the immune system also are at increased risk for infection.

Most persons infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12–72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts four to seven days, but may be severe in some. Infection is usually diagnosed by culture of a stool sample.

To prevent illness associated with baby chicks:

- Do not purchase baby chicks as holiday gifts or indoor pets;
- Do not keep baby chicks in child care centers or inside homes;
- Avoid eating or drinking around birds or their living areas; and

- After handling any poultry, immediately wash your hands with soap and water. Avoid touching anything else before washing your hands, including pacifiers, toys or bottles.

Parents also should consider the commitment to care for these feathered pets, which mature very quickly and are often ill-suited to be cuddly pets when they are grown. It is estimated that up to 30 percent of pets given as Easter presents die, and most others are abandoned or turned in to animal shelters. Few households have the ability to care for grown fowl.

More information can be found at CDC's Healthy Pets Healthy People Easter chick's website: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/easter\\_chicks.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/easter_chicks.htm).

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# After you touch ducklings or chicks, wash your hands so you don't get sick!



-  Contact with live poultry (chicks, chickens, ducklings, ducks, geese, and turkeys) can be a source of human *Salmonella* infections.
-  *Salmonella* germs can cause a diarrheal illness in people that can be mild, severe, or even life threatening.
-  Chicks, ducklings, and other live poultry can carry *Salmonella* germs and still appear healthy and clean.
-  *Salmonella* germs are shed in their droppings and can easily contaminate their bodies and anything in areas where birds live and roam.

## Protect Yourself and Your Family from Germs

### DO:

-  Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching live poultry or anything in the area where they live and roam.
  -  Adults should supervise hand washing for young children.
  -  If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer until you are able to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
-  Clean any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for live poultry outside the house, such as cages or feed or water containers.

### DON'T:

-  Don't let children younger than 5 years of age, elderly persons, or people with weak immune systems handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry.
-  Don't let live poultry inside the house, in bathrooms, or especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored, such as kitchens, or outdoor patios.
-  Don't snuggle or kiss the birds, touch your mouth, or eat or drink around live poultry.

