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Health Officials Warn About the Risks of Handling Live Poultry

April 21, 2017 - Health officials at the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department would like to inform people about the health risks of handling live poultry. Spring and early summer means it is time to start planning for and building the backyard chicken coop. While chickens are fun for the whole family, it is important to be aware that chickens, as well as other poultry including ducks, turkey, and geese, can carry *Salmonella*.

Salmonella is a common bacteria found in the droppings of poultry and can easily be transmitted, contaminating feathers, feet and beaks of birds, as well as cages, coops and the environment where birds live and roam. People who may have contracted *Salmonella* could show signs of diarrhea, vomiting, fever and/or abdominal cramps lasting four to seven days or more. *Salmonella* infections can be especially serious for the very young, the very old, and those with weak immune systems.

“Washing your hands thoroughly before and after handling chickens and other poultry protects both you and your family from the risk of *Salmonella*, and also helps keep the birds healthy,” says Michelle Klein, Personal Health Director for the Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department. “Even birds appearing cute, healthy, and clean can carry bacteria that can make people sick.”

People should follow these recommendations to protect themselves and others:

- Children younger than five years old, older adults or people with weak immune systems should not handle or touch poultry, including chicks or ducklings typically shown in store fronts or at pet stores because they are more likely to become severely ill.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching the birds or anything in their environment.
- Use hand sanitizer until you can wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Always keep poultry away from areas where food or drink is prepared, served or stored, such as kitchens or outdoor patios.
- Do not kiss chicks or ducklings.
- Do not touch your mouth, or eat and drink after handling poultry.
- Do not keep live poultry inside the house where people live, eat or sleep.
- Do not give live baby poultry as gifts to young children.

Stay outdoors when cleaning any equipment associated with raising or caring for poultry, such as cages, feed, water containers and other materials.

For more information, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/features/salmonellapoultry/index.html>