



Chicks: Cute, soft and potentially dangerous?

Adults and children alike can find baby chicks irresistible. But don't purchase baby chicks or other livestock before you think through your commitment to the creatures and consider potential risks.

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If you purchase chicks as gifts, don't forget these cute creatures grow into adults ready to provide you with eggs, meat or continued company. NEVER purchase an animal--whether as a pet or livestock--without careful forethought. Enjoy the baby chicks you're raising on your farm under your close watch—but beware of the risks involved when buying commercially available baby birds at Easter.

Each spring, a handful of children who receive chicks for Easter are infected with Salmonella, a harmful bacteria often present in baby birds, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While chicks and ducklings can carry salmonellosis at any time of the year, spring is especially a breeding ground for the disease because of higher consumer demand for chicks during Easter. Hatcheries increase quantities and the chicks are shipped around the country, increasing the stress of the birds and making them more prone to become ill or shed harmful bacteria.

The CDC lists several ways to prevent the risk of catching salmonellosis from chicks and ducklings: Do not give chicks or ducklings to young children. Instead, consider whether you'd like to add poultry to your farm; it's not a casual decision. Then consider buying from a farmer you know or a reputable hatchery.

Do not let children under 5 years of age handle baby chicks or other young birds.

If anyone touches the chicks or ducklings in their environment, make sure that they wash their hands immediately afterward. Pacifiers, toys, bottles or other objects should not touch the baby birds or their enclosures. If these objects do become contaminated, wash them with warm, soapy water.

Do not allow anyone to eat or drink while interacting with birds or their environment. Keep the bird area separate from areas where food and drink are prepared or consumed. Do not allow chicks or ducklings on table surfaces or places where food will be prepared or eaten. Talk to your health care provider and your veterinarian about possible risk factors for Salmonella

If your child is infected with the disease, the symptoms will usually start 1-3 days after ingesting the bacteria and usually last 1 week. The most common symptoms are diarrhea, fever, stomach pain, nausea, chills, headaches, and body aches.

Children, the elderly, and others with weakened immune systems may have a more severe infection, according to the CDC.