

Keeping your family healthy with backyard poultry, including chicks and ducklings

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not be used in the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

- Live poultry, such as chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys and their young (e.g. chicks and ducklings) often carry harmful germs such as *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella*. While they usually do not make the birds sick, *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* can cause serious illness when passed to people. Symptoms can include diarrhea (sometimes bloody), stomach pain and vomiting.
- These germs are in the bird's droppings (poop) which can then get on their bodies and surfaces and objects around them.
- Children younger than 5 years of age, adults older than 65 years, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of serious infection from these germs, so they should not handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry, or any surfaces or objects in contact with these birds.
- Should you or your family become sick with symptoms of *Campylobacter* or *Salmonella*, let your health care provider know that you have had exposure to live poultry.
- Any change to the birds' health, should be discussed with a veterinarian or the store, farm, or hatchery where you got the birds.

How to keep you and your family from getting sick

There is always a risk of illness when interacting with live poultry, including chicks and ducklings. By following the DOs and DO NOTs listed next, you can decrease the chance of you or your family becoming ill.

DOs:

- Always **wash your hands** thoroughly with soap and water immediately after touching any live poultry or their droppings or touching any surfaces or items in the area where they live or have spent time.
- Adults should supervise children around live poultry and when hand washing.
- Change any clothes that were in contact with the birds during handling.

- Keep the birds in an enclosed area that is easy to clean and disinfect.
- Regularly clean and then disinfect the birds' enclosure/habitat and any equipment used in their care. Only put the birds back in the area once it is clean and dry.
- Clean and then disinfect any surfaces live poultry have contacted.
- Wipe up droppings using a disposable towel and clean and disinfect the area.
- Wear gloves when cleaning and disinfecting and when wiping up droppings. Always wash your hands after removing your gloves.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for proper use of the disinfectant (e.g. should it be diluted, how long to leave it before wiping dry). **It is important to note that disinfectants only work properly on surfaces that have been cleaned first.**
- If you bathe the birds or let them swim, use a plastic tub or bin that is solely for the birds' use only.

DO NOTs:

- Do not bring chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry into households or settings with children younger than 5 years of age, adults older than 65 years, pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems.
- Do not kiss or snuggle the birds, touch your face or eat or drink when handling live poultry.
- Do not feed the birds directly from your hands.
- Do not allow live poultry to be on surfaces that cannot be cleaned and disinfected, such as carpeting or cloth furniture. Do not allow birds to wander around inside your home.
- Do not allow live poultry in areas where people's food or drinks are prepared, served, eaten, or stored.
- Do not bathe or swim the birds or clean their habitats in a sink, bathtub or pool that is also used by people.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Ministry of Health, Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health – Public Health in collaboration with Public Health Ontario and the Office of the Chief Veterinarian for Ontario.