

Rethink baby chick purchases; Oregon poultry pose Salmonella threat

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

With spring and Easter known as a popular time of year for people to buy baby chicks, the Oregon Department of Health Services (ODHS) yesterday announced the results of a study by two state agencies stating that nearly one-fifth of chicks sold in agricultural feed stores in the western part of the state harbor Salmonella bacteria.

The Oregon Public Health Division and the Oregon Department of Agriculture surveyed agricultural feed stores in western Oregon in February and March of last year. Salmonella bacteria were found in 25 (18 percent) of the 137 chicks tested in 16 stores.

The results were included in a publication by the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention released this week. The CDC publication can be found online.

"Any time anyone comes in contact with animals including poultry and their contaminated environment, they run the risk of contracting Salmonella," said William Keene, a senior epidemiologist at the Oregon Public Health Division.

The CDC found that Salmonella poisoning from baby poultry purchased as pets or for backyard flocks represents an ongoing public health concern and causes multiple hospitalizations each year. Since 1996, chicks have been connected with seven outbreaks of Salmonella in Oregon, affecting at least 71 individuals.

The Oregon study showed that families usually purchase baby poultry at agricultural feed stores and raised concerns that not all feed stores provide information to customers about the health risks of bird and other animal contact or how to minimize the risk. The Oregon Department of Agriculture has provided feed stores in Oregon with a brochure that specifically addresses the risk of handling chicks.

In 2006, outbreaks of Salmonella infection from baby poultry were traced to hatcheries in three states, including Washington and New Mexico.

Though chicks, ducklings and goslings may not appear dirty, they could carry feces on their feet, feathers and beaks. Poultry should always be housed outside because of the risk of tracking the infection into the household environment. The first symptom of Salmonella is usually diarrhea. Other symptoms include fever, vomiting and stomach cramps.

To reduce the risk of illness or death from Salmonella, the Oregon Public Health Division recommends giving children stuffed instead of live animals. The Health Division also recommends hand washing with soap and warm water after having contact with baby poultry or contaminated environmental surfaces.

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