



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Secretary

Building a Healthy New Mexico!

Bill Richardson Governor

Jennifer Stone
Deputy Secretary

Jessica Sutin
Deputy Secretary

Duffy Rodriguez
Deputy Secretary

For immediate release:
April 5, 2006

Contact: Deborah Busemeyer
505-827-2619, 470-2290

Dept. of Health, Livestock Board Issue Warning About Salmonella Risk Baby Chicks and Ducklings are Not Good Pets for Children

(Santa Fe) The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Livestock Board warn families that baby chicks or ducklings are not appropriate Easter gifts for children. Last year 26 people from 15 states, including four New Mexicans, were infected with the same strain of Salmonella, caused mainly by exposure to baby chicks.

Interviews by state health agencies found that the majority of people infected were exposed to baby birds within several days of becoming sick. Six of the people were hospitalized. The average age of the cases was two years old, though some adults were infected as well.

“Some of the risk factors for people getting sick with Salmonella from baby chicks were keeping them inside the house and allowing small children to handle and snuggle with the baby birds,” said Dr. Paul Ettestad, state public health veterinarian at the Department of Health. “Some small children didn’t handle the baby birds at all, but their parents did not wash their hands properly after handling the birds and gave the infection to their children indirectly.”

“While there are many legitimate reasons to purchase baby chicks to raise for food, we are asking feed stores around the state to strongly discourage people from buying baby chicks as pets, especially if they have young children,” said Dr. Dave Fly, deputy state veterinarian with the New Mexico Livestock Board. “Many chicks and young birds carry Salmonella in their droppings. It is difficult to know if chicks are carrying Salmonella because they will not usually show signs of illness.”

Early symptoms of Salmonella in people include fever, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. These symptoms develop within one to three days after exposure to baby chicks and their droppings. Other symptoms might be nausea, chills, or headaches.

Important preventive measures people can take include the following:

- Do not purchase live animals as Easter gifts. Give stuffed toy animals instead.
- Do not keep chicks or ducklings if a household has children less than five years of age.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after touching chicks or ducklings or anything in their environment. Supervise hand washing for small children to make sure it is adequate.
- Do not eat or drink around your chickens.

- Keep chickens away from food preparation areas.
- Do not allow chickens to roam freely in the house.
- Visit your physician if you experience abdominal pain, fever, and/or diarrhea.
- Other recommendations can be found on the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/easter_chicks.htm