News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Baby Chicks Reaches Wyoming

While most people know salmonella outbreaks can be linked with certain contaminated foods, some may not realize handling live poultry can also sometimes spread the illness, according to the Wyoming Department of Health.

"Right now we are following up on three confirmed cases and one probable case connected to a large, current multistate outbreak of salmonella linked to baby chicks," said Kelly Weidenbach, foodborne disease epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health. Many families order chicks directly from large hatchery businesses online or on a mail order basis; the same large hatcheries also often supply local feed stores.

"Unfortunately, this happens on a regular basis. Each year, particularly in the spring, we see salmonella infections among Wyoming families that we determine were caused by contact or close proximity with baby chicks," Weidenbach said.

Salmonella germs can cause a diarrheal illness in people that can be mild, severe or sometimes life threatening. Weidenbach noted baby chicks, ducklings and other live poultry can appear healthy and clean but still carry the germs, which are shed through their droppings.

Weidenbach offered advice to help prevent the spread of salmonella through contact with live poultry:

- Children younger than 5 years of age, elderly persons or people with weak immune systems shouldn't handle or touch chicks or other live poultry.
- After touching live poultry or anything in the area where they are found, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. If soap and water aren't available, use hand sanitizer.
- Don't let live poultry inside the house, in bathrooms or in areas where food or drink is prepared, served or stored.
- Don't eat or drink around live poultry, touch them with your mouth or hold closely around your face.
- Clean equipment or materials used in caring for live poultry outside the house, such as cages or feed or water containers.

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