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Safety Considerations with Back Yard Chickens

Raising chickens in the backyard has become popular in the United States, and Brevard County is no exception. Small flocks can be part of a greener, healthier lifestyle while providing fresh eggs for the table, insect control for the yard (if chickens are aloud to forage), and hours of entertainment for the family.

While enjoying all the benefits of raising back yard chickens, it is also important to remember the risk of illness. This can result from playing in the area where they are kept or through handling the live birds. Poultry of any kind are carriers of harmful bacteria called *Salmonella*. *Salmonella* is a type of germ that naturally lives in the intestines of poultry and many other animals. Even organically fed poultry have *Salmonella*. While it usually doesn't make the birds sick, the bacteria can cause serious illness when it is passed to humans.

People become infected with *Salmonella* when they put their hands, or other objects that have been in contact with feces in or around the mouth. Young children are especially at risk for illness because their immune systems are still developing, and because they are more likely to put fingers or other items into their mouths. It is important to wash hands immediately after touching poultry or anything from the area where they live and roam, because germs on hands can easily spread!

Symptoms of *Salmonella* are abdominal cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, and fever. Serve *Salmonella* infections may require hospitalization. Children under the age of five years, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems (including pregnant women) are more likely to experience serious illness. When severe infections occur, *Salmonella* may spread from intestines to the bloodstream and then to other body sites. Death may result unless antibiotics are promptly administered.

To reduce the risk of contracting *Salmonella*:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after touching live poultry or objects in an area where they live and roam. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.
- Thoroughly cook eggs, as *Salmonella* can pass from healthy looking hens into the interior of normal looking eggs.
- Don't allow children younger than five years of age, older adults, or people with weak immune systems to handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry.

Back Yard Chickens and Salmonella

-Don't eat or drink in areas where the birds live or roam.

-Don't allow live poultry inside the house, particularly in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored. Recent reports of *Salmonella* have been linked to contact with live poultry that have been brought into the home.

After you touch a bird or objects from the area where they are kept, wash your hands!

You can learn more about the signs, symptoms and treatment of *Salmonella* infection by visiting the [CDC's Salmonella website](#). If you suspect you or your child has *Salmonella* infection, please contact your health care provider immediately.