

## Backyard Chickens: A New Typhoid Mary?

Our topics for this week are:

- **What is salmonellosis and why are backyard poultry associated with it**
- **Signs and symptoms of salmonellosis**
- **How to avoid salmonellosis from backyard poultry**

Salmonellosis is a disease that causes severe gastrointestinal illness, including diarrhea, fever, sepsis, headaches, abscesses, and death. One of the types is called typhoid. Typhoid was one of the diseases that killed thousands of western pioneers in the 19th century. Poor sanitation and contamination of limited water supplies were major contributors to the disease spread.

Some people who acquire *Salmonella* bacteria do not become ill but can transmit it to others who develop the disease. One famous example was a lady named Mary Mallon. She was a cook for several families in New York between 1897 and 1907 that carried *Salmonella* without symptoms. Fifty seven people were suspected to have been infected from her and at least 3 died. Because of her risk to public health, she was forcibly quarantined until the time of her death 23 years later.

Poultry commonly carry a similar form of *Salmonella* bacteria while appearing healthy. *Salmonella* infections associated with backyard poultry in the United States are on a steady rise, paralleling the growing popularity of backyard poultry. Over the past decade, the Centers for Disease Control has reported a total of 9,923 cases of human salmonellosis across multiple states linked with backyard poultry, most of them involving multidrug-resistant strains. Among 109 people from 29 states who acquired salmonellosis from backyard poultry 43% were children under 5 years old. Illness begins in 6 hours to 6 days of exposure and is more severe in children under 5 years of age and adults more than 65 years of age.

Eggs are among the most nutritious foods on earth. Plus, raising chickens can be fun, educational, provide high quality meat and eggs, and aid in weed and insect control. What is needed is not to avoid raising poultry but to avoid acquiring salmonellosis. This involves the following:

- Wash your hands immediately after touching poultry, their eggs and anything where they live or roam. If water and soap are not readily available, use hand sanitizer,
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke anywhere near poultry.
- Supervise young children to prevent them from putting their hands near their mouth or eyes when around poultry, their eggs, or poultry containment areas.

Very young children, under 5 years, should not be allowed near poultry or their surroundings.

- Do not clean poultry supplies or equipment in the house.
- Dispose of eggs with cracked shells.
- When needed, clean dirty egg shells with a fine brush, not water.
- Refrigerate gathered eggs.
- Never consume raw eggs, including uncooked cookie dough.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Healthy appearing poultry can carry and transmit salmonellosis to people.**
- 2. Children under 5 years old are most susceptible to acquiring salmonellosis from backyard poultry.**
- 3. Salmonellosis from backyard poultry can usually be avoided with consistent use of simple sanitation practices.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 325 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.