

Backyard Chickens: Protecting Your Health

Community and Public Health

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Wash your hands after you touch chickens, so you don't get sick!

Contact with chickens can be a source of human infections such as *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella*. These bacteria can cause gastrointestinal illness that can be mild, severe, or even life threatening.

Chickens can carry *Campylobacter* or *Salmonella* germs and still appear healthy and clean. These germs are shed in their droppings and can easily contaminate their bodies and anything in areas where birds live and roam.

10% of Cantabrians infected with *Campylobacter* had contact with chickens in their own backyards.

Protect yourself and your family

Be aware that young children, elderly people, and those with weak immune systems are more at risk of serious illness – so they should avoid contact with chickens.

- Keep chickens out of the house, especially areas where food or drink is prepared or stored, such as kitchens or outdoor dining areas.
- Keep chickens away from face and mouth. Don't snuggle or kiss the birds, or touch your face after touching chickens, and don't eat or drink around chickens.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water straight after touching chickens, or anything in the area where they live or roam. Young children need help with hand-washing.
- Remove footwear worn around chickens before going inside your house.

Take care with eggs too

- Collect eggs daily.
- Discard any cracked eggs.
- Clean visibly soiled eggs by brushing with a dry abrasive pad or fine sandpaper.
- Very dirty eggs can be gently washed in water that is slightly warmer than the egg (approx. 42° C). Cold water or rough cleaning will force bacteria into the egg. Allow to dry before storing.
- Wash hands after collecting eggs and discard eggshells as soon as they are used.

Eggs will stay fresh for much longer if stored in the fridge.

Chicken house and equipment

Always wear a dust mask when cleaning your chicken house. A spray bottle of water or a light spray with a hose before cleaning will help keep dust down.

Chicken feeders and water bowls or waterers should be cleaned out regularly. Use mild detergent and water, rinse, and allow to dry.

Regularly change the material in nesting boxes. This will prevent eggs from becoming dirty and reduce spread of lice, mites etc. Make sure the material you use is clean, dry, and mould free.



Image sourced from the SPCA New Zealand website.