

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive  
JOSHUA LIPSMAN, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health  
SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 6, 2007**

**BABY CHICKS ARE CUTE, BUT THEY CAN MAKE YOU SICK**

This Easter weekend, the Westchester County Department of Health is advising people not to give live baby poultry as Easter gifts or use them in Easter displays due to the risk of Salmonella.

“Young poultry, including chicks, ducklings, goslings and baby turkeys, can be infected with Salmonella,” said Westchester County Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua Lipsman. “This is a type of bacteria that can spread from the birds to humans and cause a gastrointestinal illness that can have severe outcomes for the young, elderly and those with compromised immune systems.”

Salmonella bacteria may be present in the intestinal tracts of baby poultry without causing them to be ill. However, the bacteria are passed in feces causing environmental contamination. People may be infected by handling the baby poultry or contaminated surfaces. Those infected with Salmonella may experience diarrhea, fever, and stomach pains one to three days after becoming infected.

While anyone exposed to Salmonella can get salmonellosis, it is diagnosed more often in infants and children. Young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems are the most likely to develop severe infections and be hospitalized.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported outbreaks of human salmonellosis in Michigan, Nebraska, and Oregon associated with baby poultry. Many of those infected had purchased the birds from distributors such as agricultural feed stores.

New York State Agricultural and Markets Law prohibits the sale of chicks, ducklings or other baby fowl under the ages of two months, unless purchased in larger quantities (more than six). It is also illegal to sell baby poultry that has been dyed or colored.

**MORE**

The Westchester County Health Department wants the public to be aware of the potential health risks associated with young poultry and the need for humane care of the birds. To reduce the risk of illness, the Health Department offers the following recommendations:

- Avoid giving live chicks, ducklings and other poultry as gifts at Easter or any other time of year;
- Thoroughly wash your hands with warm soap and water after handling live poultry or touching anything else that has been in contact with poultry;
- Avoid contact with bird feces;
- Prevent children under the age of five years from handling or kissing chicks or other baby birds;
- Refrain from eating or drinking while interacting with birds or their environment;
- Keep the bird area separate from areas where food and drink are prepared or consumed;
- Discuss the risks of animal contact with your health care provider if you or a family member has a weakened immune system.

For more information, please call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department website at [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health)