

Never Kiss a Chicken



Facilitator Background:

Did you know that kissing chickens is actually a big problem in the United States? Chickens can carry many different **zoonotic** (zoh-oh-nah-tik) diseases that can be passed along to humans. For example, on rare occasions, avian flu can infect someone who breathes in the virus or who touches the virus and then touches their face. An infected person can then spread the virus to other people or to other birds.

More commonly, chicken-to-human infections are caused by bacteria such as E. coli, Listeria, Campylobacter, and Salmonella. In humans, these infections can cause fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or even death. Infected chickens may look depressed, act ill, stop eating normally, develop a cough, suffer from diarrhea, or show no symptoms at all. Salmonella and campylobacter rarely cause illness in chickens, even though they are quite dangerous to people. Salmonella is of particular concern for backyard poultry keepers: according to the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 54 different outbreaks of salmonellosis between 1990-2014 were traced to backyard flocks. A large outbreak in 2021 sickened more than 1,100 people across 48 states, resulting in 273 hospitalizations and, sadly, 2 deaths. Children under 5 made up nearly 25% of the reported cases.

Fortunately, simple safety measures can go a long way towards protecting people and poultry. Many bacteria spread through contaminated droppings, so keeping poultry areas clean and dry can reduce the chances of spreading. Another key step in disease prevention is to keep your chickens, their feed, and any shoes, gloves, or tools you use to care for them outside and away from play areas. Even very clean chickens produce a lot of dust that can cling to surfaces and host bacteria. A third step, and a critically important one, is to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water **before and after** you touch eggs, chickens, or anything that comes in contact with them.

According to a survey of salmonellosis victims conducted by the CDC:

- 10% of respondents kept their chickens in a bedroom
- 13% of respondents kissed their chickens
- 52% of respondents had owned chickens for less than one year.

Source: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/22/10/15-0765_article

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Never kiss a chicken, child.
No, never kiss a chick.
Peeps seem sweet, soft, and fluffy
But a kiss can make you sick.

Enjoy your chickens as they scratch
And hunt for tasty worms,
But save your smooch for someone else
'Cuz where there are worms, there are germs.

A rooster with his tail held high
Is such a handsome fella.
But plant your lips upon his head?
You'll succumb to Salmonella.

Should you hope to hug a mama hen
Just keep your heart in check.
Is fever and a stomachache
Really worth it for a peck?

Oh, go treasure a wing feather.
Oh, go pat a poofy crest.
But wash your hands right afterwards;
It's really for the best.

So, never kiss a chicken, child,
You'll regret it if you do.
Trust me when I say that 'cuz...
...I learned too late it's true.



Salmonella: (say "sal-mo-nel-la") noun. A type of bacteria, or germ, that can make you sick.

Chick Tip: Keep yourself and your chickens safe and healthy! Wash your hands with soap and water before and after you touch eggs, chickens, surfaces where chickens live, or anything that might have come in contact with a chicken. Washing hands is one of the best ways to keep everybody safe from germs.



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