

CDC recommendations for keeping live poultry



Person washing their hands with soap and water.

- [Wash your hands](#) thoroughly with soap and water
 - right after handling birds' food and water dishes or other equipment.
 - after cleaning bird cages or perches.
 - before you eat, drink, or smoke.
- Adults should supervise hand washing for children under 5 years of age.
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available. Be sure to have an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol near the bird's enclosure to encourage guests and children to clean their hands after handling birds.
- Don't snuggle, kiss, or touch your mouth to live baby poultry.
- Do not let children younger than 5 years of age handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or other live poultry without supervision. Children younger than 5 years of age are more likely to get sick from exposure to germs like *Salmonella*.
- Don't give live baby chicks and ducklings to young children as gifts. Because their immune systems are still developing, children are more susceptible to infection from germs commonly associated with live baby poultry, such as *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *E. coli*.
- Make sure that your children and anyone who is visiting your home follow these rules as well.

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Preparing for your backyard poultry



Group of baby chicks.

- Check your state, local, and property laws before selecting or buying baby chicks, adult poultry (hens, roosters), or waterfowl. Many cities have rules against owning roosters because they violate noise ordinances with their loud crowing.
- Find out if there is a local veterinarian who has experience with poultry to help you keep your birds healthy.
- Learn what types of birds are suitable for your family. Certain types of birds, like [young chicks](#), [ducklings](#), [goslings](#), and [poults](#), might not be suitable for young children or people with weak immune systems who are living in the household.
- Research and learn how to properly care for your birds before you buy them. Ask your veterinarian about the proper food, care, and enclosure or environment that is best for the birds you are selecting.
- Build an enclosure. Backyard poultry need a sturdy environment that is easy to clean and that will protect them from wild animals and provide shelter from the weather.
- Be aware that birds can shed *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli*, and other germs in their droppings. Plan to wear gloves when cleaning bird cages and poultry houses, and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after you have any contact with the birds or their environment.

Importing poultry into the United States

- USDA regulates the importation of poultry and poultry hatching eggs. Because avian influenza can cause serious illness, USDA restricts the importation of poultry and poultry hatching eggs from countries where avian influenza has been reported. People interested in importing poultry or poultry hatching eggs should visit the [USDA Live Animal Importation website](#).

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Choosing and introducing birds

- Pick birds that are bright, alert, and active. Birds should have smooth, sleek, and soft feathers that are free of debris or droppings. Birds who seem depressed, aren't moving around very much or look dirty may be ill.
- When bringing new birds to an existing flock, be sure to keep them separated for at least 30 days before they are introduced. This will help prevent the new birds from passing disease to your flock. Make sure to clean and disinfect yourself when working between the two groups of birds during this period of separation. For example, you can wear a separate pair of gloves and boots, and you should wash your hands or at least use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you go between the two groups.
- Contact your veterinarian if you notice any signs of illness in your poultry. Sick birds can:
 - Be less active than normal.
 - Eat or drink less than normal.
 - Have ruffled feathers, discharge from the eyes or nose, difficulty breathing, or runny diarrhea.
 - Produce fewer eggs than normal.
 - Die unexpectedly of no apparent cause.

Housing backyard poultry



A woman stands near her chicken coop.

- Do not allow poultry or waterfowl inside your home.
- Provide your backyard poultry with a safe, sturdy environment outdoors, with housing areas and feeders/waterers that can be easily cleaned and disinfected.
- Do not house live baby poultry in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored, such as kitchens or outdoor patios. Housing poultry in bathrooms is not a good idea either, but if you must

keep them in bathrooms, be sure to clean and disinfect bathrooms with bleach or other [disinfectant\[PDF - 20 pages\]](#). When using disinfectants, make sure to follow the label instructions for diluting the disinfectant and for leaving it on surfaces for the proper contact time before wiping or rinsing it off.

- Clean poultry enclosures and outside bird cages with a bottle of dish soap and a commercial disinfectant dedicated to this purpose. Go outside to clean any equipment or materials associated with raising or caring for live poultry, such as cages or feed or water containers. Do not clean these items inside the house. This could bring harmful germs into your home.
 - First remove debris (manure, egg droppings, dirt) by wiping the equipment with warm water and dish soap to loosen the material.
 - Once most of the debris is removed and the surface is generally clean, then apply the disinfectant, diluted properly according to label directions. Most disinfectants only work on clean surfaces and don't work if they are applied directly to a dirty surface.
 - Leave the disinfectant on the surface for the proper contact time listed on the disinfectant label, then rinse and allow the surface to dry before reuse.
- If possible, set aside a pair of shoes to wear while taking care of poultry and keep those shoes outside of the house.

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Monitor your pet's health



A veterinarian looks closely at a chicken for signs of illness.

- Work closely with a veterinarian who has experience with poultry for routine evaluation and care to keep your flock healthy and prevent infectious diseases.

- Keep coops and enclosures clean to prevent the build-up of animal droppings. When you clean droppings and cages, use disposable gloves, do not pick up droppings with your bare hands, and make sure to wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- If your birds become sick or die soon after purchase, inform the feed store or hatchery about the bird's illness or death. Consider waiting before purchasing or adopting another animal. Do not reuse the cage or enclosure until it has been properly cleaned and disinfected.
- A healthy bird can still spread germs to people and other animals. If you become sick shortly after buying or adopting a bird, tell your health care provider about your new animal and other animals that live in your household.

Bird bites and scratches

Backyard poultry and waterfowl do not have teeth, but their bills and beaks can still cause a lot of damage if they bite or try to bite you. Germs can spread from bird bites and scratches, even when the wound does not seem deep or serious.

- Avoid bites and scratches from your backyard poultry or waterfowl. This will prevent injury and reduce the risk of your birds spreading germs to you.
- If you are bitten or scratched by a bird, you should:
 - Wash wounds thoroughly with soap and water immediately — hand sanitizer is not as effective at removing germs as washing your hands with soap and water.
 - Seek medical attention:
 - if the bird appears sick.
 - if the wound is serious (uncontrolled bleeding, loss of function, extreme pain, or deep wound with the muscle or bone exposed).
 - if the wound becomes red, painful, warm, or swollen.
 - if it has been more than 5 years since your last tetanus shot.
- If you seek medical attention, make sure to tell your doctor if you were bitten or scratched by a bird.