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Baby Animals Are Not Good Easter Gifts



Chocolate bunnies, jellybeans and candy baskets are traditional Easter presents, but here's an Easter gift that should not be given to children: baby animals.

Chicks, ducklings and rabbits are sometimes given to children as Easter pets, but they're not good choices for several reasons. Children are not always dependable caretakers and animals may end up abandoned in parks and wildlife areas. Baby birds also often carry a harmful bacteria called Salmonella. Each spring, there's an increase in Salmonella reports connected with children who were given baby birds as pets.

Salmonella symptoms include diarrhea, fever, and stomach pain that starts one to three days after ingesting the bacteria. The symptoms are usually gone in a week. The infection may be worse in children, the elderly and patients with immune-compromised systems.

Bacteria that are carried in the bird's intestine contaminate their environment and the entire surface of the animal. Children can be exposed to the bacteria by simply holding, cuddling or kissing the birds and by contact with bird enclosures or bird environments. Toddlers are most susceptible to infection because they are more likely to place their fingers in their mouths.

Each spring, there's a demand for baby animals from hatcheries and farms. To meet the demand, baby birds—especially chicks and ducklings—are hatched in large quantities and are shipped around the country. Hatching and shipping many animals at one time increases the stress upon the animals and makes them more prone to becoming ill or shedding harmful bacteria such as Salmonella.

Avoid giving baby animals to children for Easter. If children come in contact with baby birds, an adult should wash the children's hands thoroughly and avoid any eating and drinking near the birds. A chocolate bunny or a stuffed animal are better Easter gift choices. Make this a safe holiday for your kids!

For information about the Pinellas County Health Department, go to www.PinellasHealth.com.

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