

Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Wild Songbirds



Investigation Notice

Posted May 28, 2021

This outbreak investigation is over. Wild birds can carry *Salmonella* and make people sick. Always take steps to stay healthy around wild birds and bird feeders.

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 29
- Hospitalizations: 14
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 12
- Investigation status: Closed

Salmonella in Wild Songbirds and in People in the United States

Birds can carry germs like *Salmonella* while looking healthy and clean. *Salmonella* germs can spread between birds, to pets, and to people.

You can get sick when you touch your mouth with unwashed hands after touching wild birds, bird feeders or bird baths, or your pets that have contact with wild birds.

What You Should Do

Help keep people and animals healthy around wild birds, feeders and bird baths.

- Clean your bird feeder and bird bath at least monthly. You may need to clean more often as bird poop and other dirt builds up on your feeder.
 - Clean feeders outside your house when possible. If you clean it indoors, use a laundry sink or bathtub, and thoroughly clean and

disinfect the area right after. Do not clean bird feeders in your kitchen or places where food is prepared or stored.

- Follow these five steps to clean and disinfect your bird feeder:
 - Scrub feeder with warm soapy water to remove dirt. Rinse with clean water to remove soap.
 - Soak in a diluted bleach solution (9 parts water and 1 part bleach) for at least 10 minutes.
 - Rinse with water to remove any remaining bleach solution.
 - Let it dry before refilling it.
 - [Wash your hands](#) with soap and water after touching your bird feeder.
- Clean and refill your bird bath weekly or when it's visibly dirty.
- Keep pets away from bird feeders and bird baths and the areas under them.
- If you find a sick or dead bird in your yard, remove your feeder and bird bath for two weeks and clean them outdoors.

Do not touch or hand-feed wild birds with your bare hands.

- If you find a sick bird, call your state wildlife agency or wildlife rehabilitation.
- If you find a dead bird, check with your state wildlife agency for information about reporting dead birds in your area.
 - Some state and local agencies collect dead birds to test for diseases.
- If your local officials tell you to throw the dead bird away, wear gloves or place a plastic bag over your hand to pick it up. Place the bird in a plastic bag, tie the bag up, and throw it away, following your local officials' instructions. Some locations may allow dead birds to be disposed of in your regular trash. Wash your hands with soap and water when you are finished.

Always [wash your hands](#) with soap and water:

- Right after touching your bird feeder or bird bath
- Right after handling a bird, even if you wore gloves or used a bag
- Right after touching your pet or pet's supplies (like food, bowls, and toys)
- Right after picking up your pet's feces (poop), even if you used a bag

- Before you eat or drink

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CDC and public health officials in several states collected different types of data to investigate a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Typhimurium infections in people.

Epidemiologic and laboratory data showed that contact with wild songbirds and bird feeders made people sick in this outbreak.

As of May 28, 2021, this outbreak is over.

Epidemiologic Data

As of May 28, 2021, a total of 29 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Typhimurium were reported from 12 states. Illnesses started on dates ranging from December 26, 2020, to April 29, 2021.

Sick people ranged in age from 21 days to 89 years, with a median age of 13 years, and 54% were female. Of 27 people with information available, 14 were hospitalized. No deaths were reported.

State and local public health officials interviewed people about the animals they had contact with in the week before they got sick. Of the 21 people interviewed, 13 (62%) reported owning a bird feeder and 4 (19%) people reported contact with a sick or dead wild bird. Fifteen people had pets that had access to or contact with wild birds.

Laboratory Data

Public health investigators used the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that were part of this outbreak. CDC PulseNet manages a national database of DNA fingerprints of bacteria that cause gastrointestinal illnesses. DNA fingerprinting

was performed on bacteria using a method called [whole genome sequencing \(WGS\)](#).

WGS showed that bacteria from sick people's samples were closely related genetically. This means that people in this outbreak likely got sick from contact with the same source.

Officials in Oregon and Washington collected samples from sick or dead wild pine siskin birds. WGS analysis showed that the *Salmonella* from the pine siskins was closely related to bacteria from sick people.

WGS of bacteria isolated from 26 people's samples and 17 animal samples did not predict any antibiotic resistance.

Public Health Actions

Clean your bird feeder and bird bath at least monthly. You may need to clean them more often as bird poop and other dirt builds up on your feeder. Keep pets away from bird feeders and bird baths and the areas under them. Never handle wild birds with your bare hands.

If you find a sick bird, call your state [wildlife agencyexternal icon](#) or [wildlife rehabilitatorexternal icon](#). If you find a dead bird, check with your state [wildlife agencyexternal icon](#) for information about reporting dead birds in your area.