



SALMONELLA AND REPTILES

Did you know that most reptiles (lizards, snakes, turtles) carry *Salmonella* in their intestinal gut, where it lives without making them sick?

Reptiles can pass the bacteria from their droppings into their environments and onto their bodies. Many reptiles shed *Salmonella* bacteria for a long period of time. Rodents (even frozen ones) used to feed some reptiles can also carry *Salmonella* which may infect the reptile.

It is safest to always assume reptiles and feeder rodents have *Salmonella* and always take precautions to protect yourself and others who may be handling or cleaning up after a reptile.

WHAT IS SALMONELLA?

Salmonella are a group of bacteria commonly found in the intestines of animals and birds. People can get sick from contact with animals (such as reptiles, rodents, birds, dogs and cats) that can carry *Salmonella* but also from eating contaminated foods. You can also be exposed to *Salmonella* bacteria by not thoroughly cleaning surfaces that have been in contact with an animal or contaminated food.

Salmonella symptoms include sudden onset of diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting, generally occurring within 6 to 72 hours after ingesting the bacteria and last 4 to 7 days. In some cases, serious illness can develop.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Those who are particularly at risk for infection include babies, children 5 years and under, pregnant women, the elderly and those with weaker immune systems. Households with these individuals should not adopt a pet reptile because they are at higher risk for getting seriously ill.

Young children are at higher risk of infection because they often enjoy handling and interacting with reptiles and may not wash their hands before putting their fingers or other contaminated items in or near their mouths. Infants and small children can even get infected without direct contact with a reptile. Simply being in an environment where a reptile is being housed or roams, or having contact with someone who has handled a reptile, can get a young child sick.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM GETTING SICK WITH SALMONELLA WHEN IN CONTACT WITH REPTILES:

Following these simple steps will help to reduce your risk of getting ill from contact with a reptile, their foods, and their environments.



PRACTICE GOOD HAND WASHING

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water right after touching reptiles or anything in the area where they live and roam, including after handling reptile food.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer until you are able to wash your hands.
- Hand washing is especially important before preparing, serving or eating food, drinks, or preparing baby bottles.
- Adults should supervise young children when washing hands.

PRACTICE SAFE HANDLING OF REPTILES AT HOME

- Any surfaces a reptile touches should be considered contaminated, therefore use soap or a disinfectant such as bleach to thoroughly clean any surfaces that have been in contact with reptiles
- Do not let reptiles roam freely throughout the house, especially in areas where food or drink is prepared, served, or stored, such as kitchens and outdoor patios.
- Do not touch your mouth after handling reptiles or eat or drink around them.
- Children aged 5 years and under, older adults, pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems should not handle or touch reptiles, or anything in the area where they live and roam.
- Do not kiss your reptile.

PROTECT YOURSELF WHILE CARING AND CLEANING UP AFTER YOUR REPTILE

- Do not bathe reptiles in the kitchen sink or in bathroom sinks or bathtubs. Reptiles should be bathed in a tub or bin that is dedicated for reptile use only. Dispose of waste water and droppings from your reptile down the toilet instead of a sink or bathtub. Disinfect contaminated surfaces with bleach.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling rodents used as food for reptiles. Reptile foods should not be kept in the kitchen or room where people eat or drink. Dead rodents should not be kept in the same fridge as human food and frozen rodents should be prepared and defrosted outside of the kitchen using dedicated utensils and containers.
- Be aware of the specific needs of your reptile. Stress for a reptile can increase shedding of *Salmonella*.
- Do not treat a healthy reptile with antibiotics to try to eliminate *Salmonella*.

CLOSELY SUPERVISE CHILDREN WHEN HANDLING REPTILES

- Always supervise children to ensure they do not put your reptile or reptile-contaminated objects near their mouths. Ensure children wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after handling a reptile. Adults should supervise young children when washing hands.
- Households with pregnant women, young children, older adults, or immunosuppressed individuals should not keep a pet reptile these people are at higher risk for contracting serious illness.
- Do not keep reptiles in daycare centers, schools, or other facilities with children aged 5 years and under.

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