

Reptiles, Amphibians and *Salmonella*

Salmonellosis is most commonly associated with consumption of raw or undercooked food. However, did you know that reptiles and amphibians, such as turtles, lizards, frogs and snakes can carry *Salmonella*, the bacteria that cause Salmonellosis? Children under the age of 5 years, older adults and those with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk for more severe infections. Special considerations should be made before making a reptile or amphibian a family pet.

What is *Salmonella*?

Salmonella is the bacterium that causes Salmonellosis. Hundreds of people become infected with *Salmonella* associated with reptiles or amphibians contact annually. It is one cause of diarrheal illness, which generally affects the intestines, and occasionally the bloodstream.

How do people get *Salmonella* infections from reptiles and amphibians?

Reptiles and amphibians may carry *Salmonella* on their bodies, even when they appear healthy and look clean. Anything they touch can be contaminated. The germs can get on cages, aquariums, terrariums and the water reptiles and amphibians live or swim in. People become infected with *Salmonella* by hand to mouth contact. Usually, this happens when people handle reptiles or amphibians or their droppings and then accidentally touch their mouths or forget to wash their hands before eating or drinking. It is important to thoroughly wash your hands immediately after contact because the germs can easily spread to other people or things.

What are the signs, symptoms, and types of treatment available for *Salmonella* infections?

Salmonella can cause diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps and fever. Most people develop symptoms 1 to 3 days after exposure. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days and most people recover without treatment. If you or any of your family members develop diarrhea, fever or other signs of illness after contact with a reptile or amphibian, contact a physician and make sure you inform him or her of your reptile or amphibian exposure. Infants, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems can become very ill and may require hospitalization.

Who is especially at risk for getting sick?

Children under 5 years old, older adults or those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for developing severe illness due to *Salmonella* and may require hospitalization.

How do I reduce the risk of *Salmonella* infection from reptiles and amphibians?

- Reptiles and amphibians are not good pets for children under 5 years old, older adults, or those with weakened immune systems
- Supervise children when handling reptiles or amphibians
 - Do not snuggle or kiss reptiles or amphibians
 - Do not touch your mouth or eat or drink around reptiles or amphibians
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling reptiles or amphibians or anything it contacts
 - If soap and water is not available, use hand sanitizer
 - Adults should supervise hand washing for young children
- When cleaning the reptile's or amphibian's habitat:

- Wear gloves and do not clean the habitat in or near any areas used for food or drink preparation
- If possible, clean the habitat outside of the house and in an area that is not frequently accessed by children, elderly or immunocompromised people.
- Do not clean the habitat near any sources of food (such as gardens or crop fields) or drinking water
- After cleaning the habitat, remove and discard the gloves and thoroughly wash your hands.
- Children less than 5 years old should not be allowed to clean the reptile's or amphibian's habitat.
- Do not allow amphibians or reptiles to roam freely throughout your house
 - It is especially important to keep reptiles and amphibians out of food and drink preparation areas.
- Do not bathe reptiles or amphibians in your kitchen sink or near any areas used for food or drink preparation. If you use a bathtub for this purpose, it should be thoroughly cleaned and bleached afterward to kill any bacteria that may remain on the surface.

More information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SalmonellaFrogTurtle/>

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