

ZOONOTIC DISEASE PRECAUTIONS FOR PET REPTILE AND AMPHIBIAN OWNERS



Households with pet reptiles and amphibians should take additional precautions to minimize the risk of transmission of zoonotic diseases, such as salmonellosis, from these animals.

Overview

Approximately 3% of households in the United States own at least one reptile or amphibian. Reptiles (turtles, lizards and snakes) and some amphibians (frogs) can carry *Salmonella*, a bacteria that can cause illness in people. Reptiles and amphibians have *Salmonella* on their bodies even when they appear healthy and clean.

Young children are at greatest risk due to their under-developed immune systems. Illness includes diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever; severe cases may result in death. An estimated 70,000 people get salmonellosis from contact with reptiles and amphibians in the U.S. each year.

Hygiene

Hand washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of disease. Use warm water and soap for a minimum of 20 seconds (sing 'Happy Birthday' twice).

- Wash your hands often and thoroughly — and especially after:
 - Handling reptiles, their cages or items that have been in contact with reptiles
 - Handling reptile food
 - Cleaning reptile cages, bowls or accessories
- Avoid direct contact with reptile feces
 - Do not touch your mouth after handling reptiles
- Clean reptile/amphibian cages regularly – at least weekly
 - Wear disposable gloves when cleaning reptile cages
 - After cleaning the reptile/amphibian area, wash your hands (with the gloves on) with soap and water, then remove the gloves and immediately wash your hands again with soap and water
- Any surfaces a reptile/amphibian touches should be considered contaminated
 - Wash any surfaces reptiles contact Habitats and their contents, (e.g. food, water bowls) should be carefully cleaned outdoors; use a small plastic bin or tub dedicated for animal use only; disinfect with bleach afterwards
 - Kitchen or bathroom sinks should not be used to bathe reptiles or to wash their dishes, cages, or aquariums
 - If bathtubs are used for these purposes, they should be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected with bleach
 - Wear gloves when cleaning cages or aquaria
 - Wash hands afterwards

Avoidance

- Because of the high risk for disease, reptiles and amphibians should be kept out of households that have:
 - Children under the age of 5 years
 - Childcare centers, nursery schools
 - Pregnant women
 - Elderly individuals
 - Immunocompromised persons, such as those with HIV/AIDS, receiving chemotherapy or immunosuppressive drug therapies, or with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes

Reptile Contact

- Do not allow reptiles to roam freely throughout a home or living areas and especially areas where food is prepared or eaten
- Do not eat or drink while handling reptiles
- Do not kiss reptiles

For More Information

Center for Food Security and Public Health

Reptile-Associated Salmonellosis Fast Fact and Technical Disease Fact Sheet at www.cfsph.iastate.edu

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Reptiles, Amphibians, and Salmonella at <http://www.cdc.gov/features/salmonellafrogturtle/>
Healthy Pets Healthy People. Disease From Reptiles at www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/reptiles.htm
PODCAST: Water Frogs, Aquariums and *Salmonella* -- Oh My! at <http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/>

American Veterinary Medical Association

Salmonella: Amphibians and Reptiles (FAQ) at <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/FAQs/Pages/Amphibians-Reptiles-and-Salmonella-FAQs.aspx>
PODCAST: Kiss a Frog? Veterinarians warn against it at <http://www.avmamedia.org>