

# GENERAL DISEASE PRECAUTIONS

## For Pet Reptile Owners



Households with pet reptiles should take 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. Reptiles, including turtles, lizards and snakes, can carry pathogens that can cause illness in people. One of the most common diseases is salmonellosis.

An estimated 70,000 people get salmonellosis from contact with reptiles in the United States each year. Because of the high risk for disease, reptiles should be kept out of households that have:

- Children under the age of 5 years
- Childcare centers
- 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

### Hand Washing and 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' or the 'A-B-C' song twice).

- **Wash your hands often!!**
  - BEFORE—preparing food; eating; having contact with infants or young children
  - AFTER—handling reptiles, their cages or items that have been in contact with reptiles; cleaning reptile cages, bowls or accessories; using the restroom
- **Avoid direct contact with reptile feces**
- **Clean reptile cages on a regular basis, at least weekly**
  - Wear disposable gloves when cleaning reptile cages
  - Wash your hands (with the gloves on) with soap and water after cleaning reptile areas, then remove the gloves and immediately wash your hands with soap and water
- **Wash any surfaces reptiles contact**

### Reptile Contact

- Do not allow reptiles to roam freely throughout a home or living area
- Do not eat or drink while handling reptiles
- Do not kiss reptiles
- Do not allow reptiles in kitchens and other food preparation areas
  - Kitchen 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

### For More Information

Center for Food Security and Public Health. Reptile-Associated Salmonellosis Fast Fact at [www.cfsph.iastate.edu/FastFacts/pdfs/salmonella\\_reptile\\_F.pdf](http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/FastFacts/pdfs/salmonella_reptile_F.pdf)

Center for Food Security and Public Health. Reptile-Associated Salmonellosis Fast Fact at [www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/reptile\\_associated\\_salmonellosis.pdf](http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/reptile_associated_salmonellosis.pdf)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Infectious Diseases. Healthy Pets Healthy People. Disease From Reptiles at [www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/reptiles.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/reptiles.htm)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reptile-associated salmonellosis—selected states, 1998-2002. MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2003;52[49]:1206-1209 at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5249a3.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5249a3.htm)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Salmonellosis associated with pet turtles --- Wisconsin and Wyoming, 2004. MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. 2005;54(09):223-226 at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5409a3.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5409a3.htm)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated recommendations related to reptile-associated salmonellosis. MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. 2003;52(49):1206-1209 at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5249a3.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5249a3.htm)