



## Salmonella: Risk from Turtles, Lizards and Snakes



### What can happen

The risk for infection is higher for babies, children under 5, pregnant women, the elderly and those with weaker immune systems. If infected, young children are also at increased risk for serious illness because their immune systems are still developing. Most people infected with **Salmonella** have a mild, self-limiting illness with diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps. However, the infection can spread to the bloodstream, bone marrow or nervous system, leading to severe and sometimes fatal illness. Such severe infections are more likely to occur in infants and those whose immune systems are compromised (bone marrow transplant recipients, persons with diabetes mellitus, human immunodeficiency virus, and chemotherapy patients).

Most reptiles (lizards, snakes, turtles) carry **Salmonella** naturally in their intestinal gut, where it lives without making them sick. Reptiles will pass (shed) the bacteria from their droppings into their environments, contaminating their bodies, enclosures, and areas where they roam.

Most reptiles shed **Salmonella** bacteria for an extended period of time, so it is safest to always assume a reptile has **Salmonella** and take precautions to protect yourself and others who handle or clean up after a reptile.

Simply touching or holding a reptile will not contract the disease unless contaminated reptile feces is ingested. This most often occurs when humans place their hands in their mouths, or on objects or food they put in their mouths

Most humans with healthy immune systems that come in contact with **Salmonella** do not contract the disease.

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 where a reptile is being housed or roams, or having contact with someone who has handled a reptile and then not washing their hands before feeding or touching the child, can get a young child sick.

### How to protect yourself: 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.
- If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer until you are able to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Wash your hands before preparing, serving or eating food and drinks.
- Adults should supervise young children when washing hands.

### Practice safe handling of reptiles

- Do not touch your mouth after handling reptiles or eat or drink around them.
- Children under 5, 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.
- Never kiss a reptile.

### Closely supervise children

- Always supervise children to ensure they do not handle the reptiles. If they do, ensure children wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after handling a reptile. Adults should supervise young children when washing hands.
- CLOCA does not encourage or allow students to handle the wildlife encountered during the program. Staff that do handle the wildlife should follow the Toolbox Talk accordingly.