



SULCATA STATION

Facts about Salmonella and Reptile Pets

SUMMARY

Salmonella bacteria are widespread in the environment and are often carried by animals. Humans who ingest salmonella bacteria can develop a gastrointestinal infection called Salmonellosis. Symptoms typically include fever, stomachache, and diarrhea. Healthy adults can shake off a salmonella infection fairly quickly, but some people (infants, the elderly, and people whose immune systems are compromised due to disease, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or autoimmune disorders) can develop serious (and sometimes potentially fatal) complications from Salmonellosis.

However, there is an easy way to prevent this problem: **Wash your hands after handling, feeding, or cleaning up after your reptile pet.**

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SALMONELLA AND REPTILE PETS?

Media reports of people getting Salmonella infections from their reptile pets creates an erroneous perception that only reptile pets cause these problems. Frankly, you're more likely to contract Salmonella or E. coli infections from eggs or poorly-cooked meat. And pet owners should be aware that ALL pet species -- not just reptiles, but cats, dogs, and birds as well -- can carry some form of Salmonella bacteria. However, because more people are buying reptile pets, the Center for Disease Control has developed the following recommendations specifically for reptile owners:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING TRANSMISSION OF SALMONELLA FROM REPTILES TO HUMANS

- Pet store owners, veterinarians, and pediatricians should provide information to owners and potential purchasers of reptiles about the risk for acquiring salmonellosis from reptiles.
- You should always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling reptiles or reptile cages.
- If you or anyone in your household is at increased risk for infection or serious complications of salmonellosis (e.g., children aged less than 5 years and immunocompromised persons), you should avoid contact with reptiles.
- Pet reptiles should be kept out of households where children aged less than 1 year and immune-compromised persons live. If you are expecting a new baby, you should remove the pet reptile from the home before the infant arrives.
- Pet reptiles should not be kept in child care centers.
- Pet reptiles should not be allowed to roam freely throughout the home or living area.
- Pet reptiles should be kept out of kitchens and other food-preparation areas to prevent contamination. Kitchen sinks should not be used to bathe reptiles, nor to wash their dishes, cages, or aquariums. If bathtubs are used for these purposes, they should be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected with bleach afterward.

SULCATA STATION

Facts about Salmonella and Reptile Pets

Page 2 of 2

DOES THIS MEAN THAT REPTILE PETS ARE DANGEROUS TO ME AND MY FAMILY?

Not necessarily! If you follow the recommendations given above, you should prevent any problems with salmonella bacteria or salmonellosis.

Sulcata Station has numerous types of reptiles in residence (sulcata tortoises, box turtles, aquatic turtles, snakes, and bearded dragons), but we have never had a problem with salmonella. We do wash our hands after handling, feeding, or cleaning up after any reptile. (This is especially important to make sure we don't cause any cross-contamination between different species.) We also use a 10 percent bleach solution (3 to 4 ounces of bleach per quart of water) to disinfect water bowls, soaking tubs, and cage furniture, and make sure they are thoroughly rinsed to remove all bleach.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SALMONELLA

Please visit the following links to learn more about Salmonella and how you can avoid getting it from your reptile pet:

General Information on Salmonella and Salmonellosis from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/index.html>

Tortoise Trust's FAQ article on Salmonella:

<http://www.tortoisetrust.org/care/faq.html#Salmonella>