

Recommendations For Preventing The Transmission of Infectious Diseases in Reptiles



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Companion animals bring joy and are an important part of your family. There is nothing quite like seeing a person's face light up, be it a small child or an adult, when they interact with an animal. During the exciting time of having a pet in your home, please do not overlook safe animal handling practices.

Companion animals can carry diseases such as salmonella. Turtles and iguanas are the most common carriers of salmonella; however, all species of reptiles can carry this bacterium, as it is a normal inhabitant of a reptile's gastrointestinal system. Reptiles that carry this bacterium generally do not show any signs of illness.

Salmonella is an orally transmitted infectious disease generally acquired through contact with a reptile's fecal matter. Human Infection can take place by not washing your hands after having contact with any reptile, the reptile's cage, décor and substrate. Salmonella is of greatest concern for children because of their tendency to put their fingers into their mouths.

Taking these simple precautions can keep you from becoming infected:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water and use a sanitizer or anti-bacterial gel after coming in contact with any reptile, contaminated water or habitat surfaces.
- Always carry some kind of disinfectant product with you if you will be handling reptiles outside your home or in an area that lacks proper washing facilities.
- If transporting your reptile to a classroom, make sure there are proper hand washing and cleaning facilities. Do not take a reptile to a kindergarten or daycare class for show-and-tell; or, if taken, do not allow the children to touch the animal.
- Keep your reptile enclosures, water and food bowls, décor and other surfaces as clean as possible and free of soiled bedding.
- Clean cages in a well-ventilated area or outside. Wear rubber, latex, vinyl or nitrile gloves and wash hands thoroughly when you are done. Once the cage is cleaned of organic material, disinfect it with a dilute bleach solution (one-half cup of bleach to one gallon of warm water). Let the bleach solution remain on the cage and all food bowls, water dishes, hide huts, etc. for ten minutes and then thoroughly rinse with warm water; allow to completely dry before placing the animal and the contents in the habitat.
- Closely supervise young children, especially those under the age of five, when cleaning cages and ensure they wash their hands immediately after handling pet reptiles, caging or bedding.
- Do not handle your reptile or habitat furnishings with open sores or cuts on your hands. Wear rubber gloves.
- Never let your mouth come into contact with your reptile. For example, some people like to give their reptile an occasional affectionate kiss. This is a practice we do not recommend as its can transmit a disease to the person kissing the animal.
- Pet reptiles should be kept out of the kitchen and other food-preparation areas. Kitchen sinks and bathtubs should not be used to bathe reptiles, clean cages or wash companion animal items. If unavoidable, first remove all materials used to cook prepare or serve food, including the toaster. Disinfect the area thoroughly with a mild bleach solution when finished.
- Do not touch food, dishes, pots pans, or other utensils in the kitchen after you have handled your reptile, until you have washed your hands thoroughly.
- Pet reptiles should not be allowed to roam freely throughout the home or living area.
- Persons at increased risk of infection or serious complications of salmonellosis (e.g., children less than 5 years of age, immuno-compromised persons and pregnant women or women who are trying to become pregnant) should avoid contact with reptiles and reptiles should be kept out of their households.
- Families expecting a new child should remove the pet rodent from the home prior to the infant's arrival.

By following safe animal handling practices, you ensure your safety and that of your animal.

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for medical diagnosis. If you suspect your or a family member may be infected seek medical attention.

Additional information can be found at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/healthypets/ and PETCO at www.petco.com/CareSheets/CareSheets.aspx?Nav=154 or contact your local veterinarian or family physician.