

# SALMONELLA RISK FROM REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS



## What is *Salmonella*?

*Salmonella* is a group of bacteria and most persons infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and people usually recover without treatment. However, in some cases, the diarrhea may be so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized. The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have a severe illness.

## How do people get *Salmonella*?

*Salmonella* live in the intestinal tracts of humans and other animals. Illness is often caused by eating foods contaminated with animal feces or by having contact with animals, including pets, which have *Salmonella*. Contaminated foods are often of animal origin, such as beef, poultry, milk, or eggs, but any food, including vegetables, may become contaminated. **Reptiles, such as turtles, lizards and snakes, and amphibians such as frogs, are particularly likely to harbor the *Salmonella* bacteria.**

## How do people get *Salmonella* infections from reptiles and amphibians?

Reptiles and amphibians can have *Salmonella* on their bodies even when they appear healthy and clean. *Salmonella* can also get on their cages, aquariums, terrariums and other containers that house them. Anything that reptiles and amphibians touch should be considered possibly contaminated with *Salmonella*. When you touch reptiles and amphibians, the germs can get on your hands or clothing. Foods for amphibians or reptiles, such as frozen mice or rats, can also be a source of the *Salmonella* germ. It is very important to **wash hands** and any surfaces that have come into contact with amphibian or reptiles, their houses, surfaces they have touched and their food.

## How can I know if my reptile/amphibian has *Salmonella*?

Unfortunately it is not possible to tell by looking at an animal if it carries *Salmonella*. Even animals that appear healthy can carry the bacteria and spread illness.

## Can I treat my reptile/amphibian to eliminate *Salmonella*?

*Salmonella* can be treated with antibiotics but this practice is not recommended for reptile/amphibians. Actually, treating them may lead to more dangerous types of *Salmonella*.

## Why is the sale of small turtles illegal in the US?

Small turtles, with a shell length of less than 4 inches, are known to carry *Salmonella*. The sale of these turtles was banned by the FDA in 1975 because many small children were getting *Salmonella* after handling these animals. Small children are at high risk for severe disease and are more likely to do high risk behaviors when handling pets, such as kiss the pet.

## Tips for responsible amphibian or reptile pet ownership

- **DO NOT** let children younger than five, older adults, or people with weakened immune systems touch or handle amphibians or reptiles. **If your family is expecting a child, it is recommended to remove the amphibian or reptile from the home before the infant arrives.**
- **DO NOT** keep habitats containing amphibians or reptiles in a child's bedroom, especially children younger than five.
- **DO NOT** let amphibians or reptiles roam free around your home. Keep them out of kitchens and other areas where food and drink are prepared, served, or consumed. The *Salmonella* germ can live on surfaces in the home for long periods of time, so it is important to thoroughly clean any surface that comes into contact with an amphibian or reptile.
- **DO NOT** eat, drink, or smoke while handling amphibians or reptiles.
- **ALWAYS** wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching amphibians or reptiles, their food, their housing/water, or anything else that has come into contact with the animal or their feces.
- Adults should **ALWAYS** supervise hand washing in young children
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer **right away** and wash your hands with soap and water **as soon as you can.**
- Habitats, food and water containers, or any other materials used when caring for amphibians or reptiles should be cleaned outside away from sources of food (gardens or crop fields) and drinking water. If you do not have space for this outside, **DO NOT** clean animals or habitats in your kitchen sink. If bathtubs are used for cleaning, they should be thoroughly cleaned afterward.
- If you or a family member develop diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fever, or other sign of illness contact a physician and make sure to inform them of contact with amphibians or reptiles and whether you keep them in your home.

## Sources

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SalmonellaFrogTurtle/>  
<http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/salmonellosis.htm>

