

Salmonellosis Associated with Reptiles

What is reptile-associated salmonellosis and what causes it?

Salmonellosis (sal-mohn-el-OH-sis) is a bacterial disease that can cause diarrhea in humans and animals. It is caused by many different kinds of *Salmonella* bacteria. Reptiles can be carriers of the bacteria without signs of illness. Since reptiles are becoming more common as pets, an increase in reptile-associated *Salmonella* infections in humans has been seen.

What animals get reptile-associated salmonellosis?

Most reptiles can carry *Salmonella* and these bacteria have been seen in turtles, snakes, iguanas, and lizards. Evidence is increasing that amphibians (e.g. frogs, toads, newts, and salamanders) can also carry and spread salmonellosis to humans.

How can my reptile get salmonellosis?

Most, if not all, reptiles carry *Salmonella* bacteria in their intestinal tract and intermittently or continuously shed these bacteria in their feces.

How does salmonellosis affect my reptiles?

Salmonella bacteria usually do not cause any illness in reptiles.

Can I get salmonellosis?

Yes. *Salmonella* bacteria are easily spread from reptiles to humans. It is estimated that over 70,000 people get salmonellosis from reptiles each year in the United States.

Humans may become infected when they do not wash their hands after touching the feces or **objects** that have come into contact with the feces of reptiles and amphibians. This can lead to **ingestion** of the bacteria. Infants have become infected after drinking from bottles of that became contaminated from unwashed hands during preparation.

The symptoms of salmonellosis in people include diarrhea, fever, and stomach pain. These symptoms usually go away after one week. The diarrhea can be severe and infection may spread to other organs, requiring hospitalization.

Who should I contact, if I suspect salmonellosis?

In Humans – Contact your physician if you have diarrhea and tell him/her, you have been in contact with reptiles.

Should certain individuals avoid reptiles?

Households that include children under the age of five or people with weakened immune systems should not have any reptiles or amphibians in their homes. Reptiles and amphibians should not be allowed in child care centers or preschools.

How can I protect myself from reptile-associated salmonellosis?

Contact your veterinarian for advice concerning the proper diet and environment for your reptile. Healthy reptiles living in proper environments are less likely to shed *Salmonella* bacteria.

Always wash your hands with hot, soapy water after handling reptiles, their cages, and equipment. Reptiles should not be allowed to roam freely throughout a home or living area. Pet reptiles should be kept out of kitchens or any other areas in which food is prepared. Kitchen sinks should not be used to bathe reptiles or amphibians or to wash their dishes, cages, or aquariums. If bathtubs are used for these purposes, they should be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected with bleach. Do not eat or drink while handling reptiles, their cages, or equipment. Do not kiss reptiles or share food or drink with them.

For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets.

Salmonella (non-typhoidal) at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

CDC website. Salmonellosis at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/reptiles.htm>



Reptile-Associated Salmonellosis is spread by contact with feces from reptiles.

Photo from www.calverthealth.org