

REPTILES AND SALMONELLA

Reptiles such as snakes, turtles, tortoises and lizards are becoming more popular as pets in Ireland. Often they are colourful and quiet pets but they do require careful handling as most, if not all, reptiles carry bacteria called Salmonella. Salmonella bacteria can spread from reptiles to humans when something contaminated with reptile faeces is placed in the mouth. For example, infants can become infected with Salmonella by drinking bottles of formula contaminated by contact with the reptile/reptile faeces.

Salmonella infection causes diarrhoea, headache, fever and stomach cramps and can result in septicaemia (blood poisoning). Dehydration can be severe. If you develop these symptoms, you should contact your General Practitioner.

Most people have a low risk of getting ill with Salmonella infection from contact with reptiles and this risk can be reduced further by following the advice below.

Pregnant women, children, elderly or frail adults or immunosuppressed people (e.g. people with cancer, HIV/AIDS, people with CD4 count less than 200) are particularly at risk of infection. At a minimum, this group needs to take extra precautions: ideally they should avoid contact with reptiles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA recommend that children under 5 years of age avoid contact with reptiles.



To reduce the risk of getting an infection, follow this advice

- Pregnant women, children, elderly or frail adults or immunosuppressed people (e.g. people with cancer, HIV/AIDS, people with a CD4 count less than 200) should avoid contact with reptiles.
- Handling your reptile is fun but always wash your hands with hot, soapy water **after** handling reptiles, reptile tanks and equipment, reptile food and reptile faeces.
- Do not allow reptiles to have access to the kitchen, dining room, or any other area in which food is prepared. Consider keeping your reptile confined to its tank or limiting the parts of the house where reptiles are allowed to roam free. Wash hard surfaces where the reptile has been with warm soapy water followed by a disinfectant.
- Do not use the kitchen sink, kitchen counters, bathroom sinks or bathtubs (including baby-baths) to bathe reptiles or to wash reptile tanks, dishes or vivariums. Reptile owners should use a dedicated plastic basin or tub in which to bathe their reptiles. Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning cages, or equipment. Waste water and faecal material should be disposed of in the toilet or outside drain.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling reptiles, reptile tanks or reptile equipment. Do not kiss reptiles or share food or drink with them.
- Wash any clothes the reptile might have touched. Use a warm wash.
- Children who handle reptiles should avoid putting their hands near their own mouths until they have washed their hands. Likewise children should not put objects that the reptile has touched near their mouths.
- Reptiles should not be kept in child-care centres.
- Follow expert advice on the feeding and welfare (e.g. environment) of your reptile as stress to the animal can cause it to shed Salmonella. Contact your vet or a specialist reptile vet for further information on reptiles.



KEEPING HEALTHY WITH YOUR REPTILE

The South East Regional Zoonosis Committee includes the HSE, the Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, the City Council of Waterford and the County Councils of Carlow, Wexford, Kilkenny, Waterford and South Tipperary.