

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Pet-Scripton for Reptile Owners

This Pet-Scripton has been provided to help you stay healthy while enjoying your reptile(s).

Though reptiles have become popular pets in recent years, it is important to remember that they carry potentially dangerous bacteria called *Salmonella*.



Risk to Children

Did you know that the sale of turtles smaller than 4 inches in diameter has been banned in the United States since 1975? This is because these turtles pose a high risk of spreading disease, especially to children. The ban by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has prevented thousands of cases of salmonellosis annually in children.

Don't be fooled: Just because you can't see the bacteria doesn't mean they aren't there. *Salmonella* are naturally occurring bacteria in many reptiles and amphibians, and those animals infected with *Salmonella* usually do not appear sick in any way. Laboratory tests cannot always detect *Salmonella* in reptiles because the *Salmonella* may not be shed continually in the stool. Antibiotics cannot get rid of *Salmonella* in reptiles.

Salmonella cause a human disease called salmonellosis. Reptiles are responsible for an estimated 74,000 cases of human salmonellosis in the United States annually. Amphibians, including frogs, toads, newts, and salamanders, can also transmit salmonellosis. Some cases of salmonellosis may be severe and result in hospitalization, and even death, especially in susceptible people such as children, the elderly, and people who have lowered natural resistance to disease due to pregnancy, cancer, chemotherapy, organ transplants, diabetes, liver problems, or other diseases.

Stay healthy! WASH!

(Wash, Ask, Separate, Handle):



WASH your hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching any reptile or amphibian, its cage, or its feces (poop). After touching a reptile or amphibian, do not touch your face, other people or any surface until your hands are washed. **Wash any surfaces that the reptile or its cage may have touched, including counters and bathtubs, with soap and hot water.**

ASK yourself if your household is right to have a reptile as a pet. Some people are at greater risk of getting sick from reptiles. If your family or household includes an infant, a child less than five years of age, a pregnant woman, an elderly person, or anyone with health problems (especially cancer or chemotherapy, organ transplants, diabetes, liver or kidney problems, or HIV/AIDS), **do not have a reptile in your home.** A family expecting a child should remove any pet reptile or amphibian from the home before the infant arrives. If you do choose to have a reptile in the home, take your pet to a veterinarian as soon as possible after purchase to make sure it is healthy and to find out about the proper diet, heat, and light it needs to stay healthy.

SEPARATE reptiles from any contact with food or high-risk people. Don't let reptiles roam around in the kitchen or other places where food is made or eaten. Don't handle a reptile and an infant at the same time. Always wash hands well before preparing a baby's bottle or feeding a baby. Don't let people at high risk come near the reptile or its cage. Reptiles should not be allowed in daycare centers or nursing homes.

HANDLE reptiles and their cages with care. Remember, reptiles are "cute but contaminated." If possible, wash cages and everything inside them outdoors once a week, and change the bedding materials. Don't use the kitchen sink to wash the reptile's cage; if a bathtub is used for washing the cage, make sure to clean it thoroughly with dilute bleach or soap and running water before people use it.

For more information about reptiles, salmonellosis, or other pet-related health questions, visit the CDC's Healthy Pets, Healthy People website, www.cdc.gov/healthypets.

Cage Cleaning:

- 1. Clean cage once a week.**
- 2. While the cage is being cleaned, keep your reptile in another container, such as a cardboard box or shoebox that can be thrown away afterwards. If you don't have a disposable box, you can use a plastic box or pail, but be sure to wash it well afterwards. Don't let your pet reptile roam around the kitchen or other places where food is made or eaten.**
- 3. Clean reptile cages outdoors if possible. Never wash the cage in the kitchen sink.**
- 4. If cage cleaning is done in a bathtub, be sure to clean the bathtub thoroughly with a dilute bleach solution or soap and running water before people use it.**
- 5. If your reptile bathes in the bathtub, clean and disinfect the surfaces before people use it.**
- 6. Guard against "cross-contamination" – getting germs from the cage or its contents onto your hands or other surfaces through direct or indirect contact.**
- 7. If possible, wear washable or disposable gloves while cleaning, and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water afterwards.**
- 8. Use linoleum, indoor/outdoor carpeting/butcher paper or well trimmed artificial grass for substrate. These products are safer for your pet and easier to clean and sanitize.**
- 9. Remove and clean or discard all of the soiled bedding material at the bottom of the cage.**
- 10. Wash the cage with hot soapy water inside and out. Rinse thoroughly with running water. Do the same for any water dishes, food dishes, and toys that will be left in the cage.**
- 11. Sanitize the cage with a dilute bleach solution or a product containing chlorhexidine . Be sure to rinse and dry well after sanitization. Chlorhexidine is safe for reptiles but residual amounts of bleach or other commercial sanitizers left in the cage can cause severe health problems to your pet reptile.**
- 12. Replace the bedding material with clean bedding material.**
- 13. Put the clean dishes and toys back into the cleaned cage.**
- 14. Put your reptile back into its cleaned cage.**