

Reviewed December 2024

SALMONELLA GUIDELINES FOR REPTILE OWNERS **(as recommended by the British Veterinary Zoological Society)**

Most, if not all, reptiles carry Salmonella bacteria in their intestinal tract and may shed these bacteria in their faeces. Salmonella bacteria usually do not cause any illness in reptiles, but can cause serious illness in people. Salmonella bacteria are easily spread from reptiles to humans. Humans may become infected when they place their hands on infected objects, including reptiles or faeces (droppings) of reptiles, and then into their mouths. Simply touching or holding a reptile will not result in spread of bacteria unless something contaminated with reptiles' faeces or the reptile itself is placed in the mouth. Many if not all, reptiles in captivity have been found to carry Salmonella. Unfortunately, Salmonella bacteria cannot be eliminated from the intestinal tract of reptiles. Dosing reptiles with antibiotics to eliminate these bacteria has been unsuccessful and may result in Salmonella bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics that are then difficult to cure when infecting people.

Fortunately the spread of Salmonella bacteria from reptiles to humans can be easily prevented by following these simple rules:

1. **Always wash hands after handling reptiles or cleaning their vivaria**
2. **Never eat, drink or smoke when handling reptiles or cleaning their vivaria**
3. **Waste water and faecal material should be disposed of in the toilet instead of the bath or kitchen sink.**
4. **Children less than five years of age should avoid contact with reptiles and households with children less than one year of age should not own reptiles**
5. **Never leave children unattended with handling reptiles or cleaning their vivaria**
6. **Never clean out reptile vivaria or cage furnishing in sinks where food is prepared or teeth are brushed**
7. **Do not allow reptiles to roam in the kitchen, dining room, bathroom sinks and baths, to any area where infants are bathed or any other area in which food is prepared**
8. **Do not kiss or share food with the reptile**

Some Salmonella infections in humans result in a mild illness of diarrhoea, fever and abdominal cramps. In other cases, the infection can lead to severe, and sometimes fatal, illness. Such severe infections are more likely to occur in infants and in individuals whose immune system is compromised. Such persons most at risk include; bone marrow or organ transplant recipients; persons with diabetes mellitus; persons taking corticosteroids for conditions such as atopy or asthma; persons infected with the human immunodeficiency virus; chemotherapy patients.

Follow instructions from your reptile's vet concerning proper diet and environment for your reptile. Healthy reptiles living in proper environments are less likely to shed Salmonella bacteria. Information in this handout is not meant to discourage reptile ownership. With a few exceptions (for example, infants or immunocompromised individuals), most people have a low risk of acquiring Salmonellosis from reptiles, but this risk can be reduced even further by following simple precautions.