



Food safety advice

Salmonella and Exotic Pets

What is salmonella?

Salmonella is a bacteria which causes an illness characterised by diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes vomiting and fever, usually within 12-36 hours of someone being infected. The symptoms continue for several days and then, in most people, they resolve. Occasionally, a Salmonella infection may result in a very severe illness, particularly in the elderly, the very young, or someone who is already suffering from another disease or has a compromised immune system.

How can I catch it?

Salmonella is often associated with eating contaminated foods (see separate advice sheet), but it can also be contracted through hand – mouth contact e.g. by licking fingers biting nails or handling foods without washing hands when you have been handling certain types of animals/pets or their tank/vivarium.

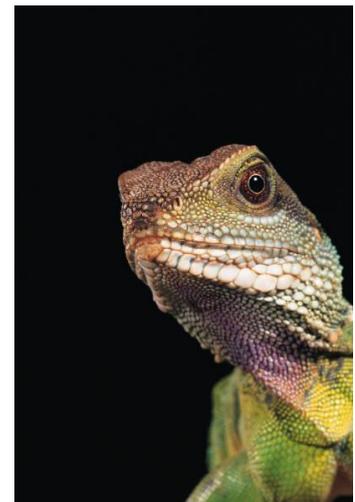
What is the problem with exotic pets?

There is concern about the potential for exotic pets such as lizards, iguanas, skinks and terrapins to pass on serious illness such as salmonella to their owners and other family members.

Research has shown that as many as nine out of ten exotic reptiles, kept as pets could be carrying salmonella without showing any signs of ill health. Cases of illness associated with pets nationally are on the increase.

Sadly in the past there have been deaths including two very young babies, believed to have caught the infection from reptiles kept as family pets.

It is estimated that there are tens of thousands of these reptiles now kept as pets. The increasing popularity for keeping these exotic pets means we have to highlight the risk of such infections in vulnerable groups such as the very young and the elderly.





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How can I avoid getting the infection?

To avoid the possible risk of infection follow the advice below:

- People at increased risk of infection or at risk from serious complications resulting from salmonella infection should avoid contact with reptiles. This includes children under the age of 5 years, pregnant women the elderly and those with impaired immunity (those who are already unwell).



- Infants under the age of 12 months are at particular risk from direct and indirect contact with reptiles - these risks include the possibility of contracting other infections such as meningitis.
 - Any person (even outside the risk groups) should always wash their hands with hot, soapy water after handling reptiles, reptile's cages and equipment and faeces from reptiles.
 - Reptiles should be kept out of food preparation areas.
 - Kitchen sinks should not be used to bathe reptiles or wash reptile food bowls, cages or aquariums. If bathtubs are used for the purpose, they should be cleaned thoroughly afterwards and disinfected with bleach and antibacterial sanitiser.
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- Consider keeping reptiles confined or limiting the parts of the house where they are allowed to roam free.
 - Do not eat, drink or smoke whilst handling reptiles or their equipment.