



Health Information Memorandum

To: All school districts, parent teacher organizations (PTA, booster clubs, etc.), and child care providers

Subject: *Salmonella* Infections from Pet Turtles and Other Reptiles and Amphibians

Recent reports of illnesses caused by *Salmonella* have highlighted the need for information regarding the risks of owning turtles, lizards, or frogs as pets.^{1,2} In order to increase awareness of the potential health risk posed by these animals, the Williamson County and Cities Health District is providing the following information to schools, parents, and child care providers.

Turtles may look like cute pets, but it is estimated that they are responsible for over 70,000 cases of *Salmonella* infections in the United States every year. Most of these illnesses occur in children under 5 years old. Hundreds of people have become ill in an ongoing, nationwide *Salmonella* outbreak connected to water frogs, and *Salmonella* outbreaks from contact with turtles continue to be reported.

People with compromised immune systems, including children, the elderly and pregnant women, are especially susceptible to *Salmonella* infections. In addition to their weaker immune systems, young children are at high risk of infection because they are likely to handle turtles or their habitats, and then without washing their hands, handle food or touch their mouths thus increasing the possibility of their ingesting *Salmonella*.

Pet owners should be aware of the risks of having a turtle, lizard, or frog as a pet. If you do own a turtle, lizard, or frog, some rules to help prevent illness are:

- ***Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after touching any animal or any object it has come in contact with.***
- Keep turtles, lizards and frogs out of homes with children under 5 years old, the elderly, or those with weakened immune systems.
- If your family is expecting a child, consider removing these types of pets from the home.
- Do not clean turtle, lizard or frog habitats or supplies in the kitchen sink. Use bleach to disinfect areas where the tank is cleaned.
- Be aware that children can contract *Salmonella* infections from turtles and other animals in petting zoos, parks, classrooms and daycare facilities. Children should always wash their hands after contact with animals.

Symptoms of *Salmonella* infection include diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, fever and headache. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should visit a doctor immediately. Suspected cases of *Salmonella* must be reported to WCCHD at (512) 943-3660.

¹“Notes from the Field: Outbreak of Salmonellosis Associated with Pet Turtle Exposures — United States, 2011” Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), February 3, 2012 / 61(04); 79 http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6104a4.htm?s_cid=mm6104a4_x

²Investigation Update: Ongoing Outbreak of Human *Salmonella* Typhimurium Infections Associated with African Dwarf Frogs: <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/water-frogs-0411/072011/index.html>

For more information visit the CDC site: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SalmonellaFrogTurtle/>