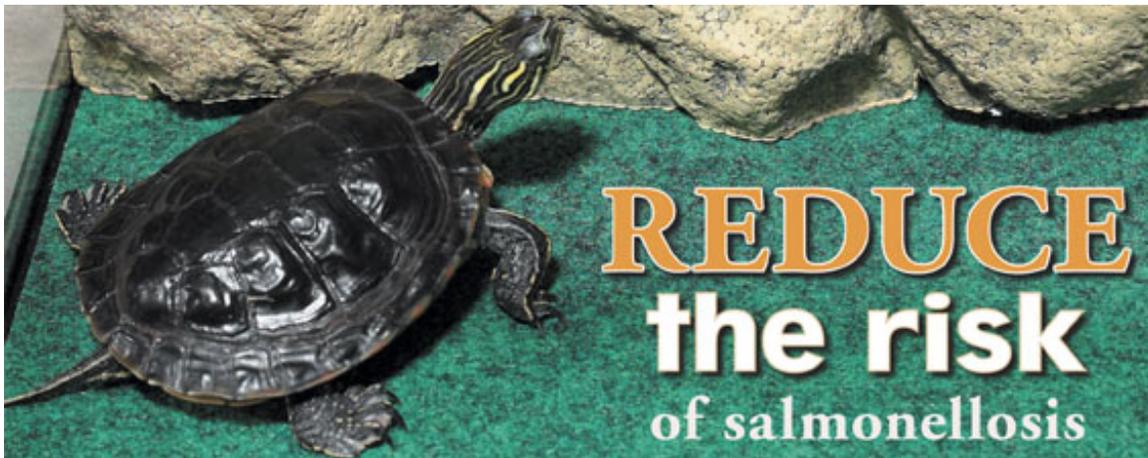


# Salmonellosis (Salmonella): How to Prevent

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If you ask the average lay person if there are any risks in owning a pet turtle or other reptile, the one that most commonly mentioned is *Salmonella*. This article will explore the risk of *Salmonella* to herp owners as well as give tips for preventing infections.

Studies have shown that 85% of turtles, 77% of lizards and 92% of snakes carry one of the 500 serotypes of *Salmonella*. With this high of an incidence one would wonder why every reptile owner in the world hasn't contracted *Salmonella*. The reality is that while most reptiles harbor some *Salmonella* organisms, there are several reasons why most people never contract the disease and the risk to most reptile owners is greatly over exaggerated.

With this being said infants, children, elderly, or immunosuppressed people can suffer severely from this disease and in some cases even die. So the risk of *Salmonella* infection should not be taken lightly and proper precautions should always be exercised.

If you have turtles, snakes, or lizards, you should just assume they have *Salmonella* unless repeated cultures show otherwise. Now just because we make this assumption for safety reasons, does not mean that we are going to contract the disease. Most healthy humans come in contact with *Salmonella* on a daily basis, but because they have a healthy immune system and they come into contact with relatively small numbers of organisms, they do not contract the disease. Generally, it is only when we have a suppressed immune system or encounter an overwhelming number of organisms that we actually contract the disease.

The numbers of *Salmonella* found in turtles, lizards and snakes are usually low and are generally shed in the feces. By following some good common hygiene practices and avoiding contact with the feces of these animals as much as possible, we can greatly reduce the risk of contracting *Salmonella*.



## Basic preventative recommendations include:

- Do not use the same equipment for your animals that you use for yourself.
- Pet reptiles should be kept out of kitchens and other food-preparation areas to prevent contamination. Kitchen sinks should not be used to bathe reptiles or to wash their [dishes](#), [cages](#), or [terrariums](#). If bathtubs are used for these purposes, they should be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected with bleach.
- Wash all [food](#) and [water bowls](#) and [equipment](#) with hot soapy water and [disinfect](#) with a chlorhexidine or household bleach solution, (remember to rinse all disinfected utensils with clean water before using).
- Wear [gloves](#) or wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling captive reptiles.
- Do not eat or smoke while working with or cleaning reptiles or their enclosures.
- Pregnant women, children, elderly or frail adults, or immunosuppressed people are particularly at risk of infection or serious complications of salmonellosis. At a minimum, they need to take extra precautions; ideally, they should avoid

contact with reptiles.

- Pet reptiles should be kept out of households where children less than 5 years or immunocompromised persons live. Families expecting a new child should remove the pet reptile from the home before the infant arrives.
- Pet reptiles should not be kept in child care centers.
- Pet reptiles should not be to roam freely throughout the home or living area.

If these basic precautions and good common sense are observed, the risk of contracting *Salmonella* from a reptile is very low. Enjoy the reptile and remember that good hygienic practices are one of the best things you can do to protect yourself and your reptile from a whole host of infectious diseases.