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Update on Multistate Outbreak of *Salmonella* Infections Linked to Pet Turtles

January 9, 2020 – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health officials in several states have completed an investigation of a multistate outbreak of human *Salmonella* Oranienburg infections linked to contact with pet turtles.

Twenty-six cases of human *Salmonella* Oranienburg infections have been reported in 14 states between May 29, 2019, and October 31, 2019. Of 22 people interviewed, 16 reported contact with pet turtles before becoming ill. The ages of those infected range from less than one year to 80, with a median age of 25. Eight people have been hospitalized; there have been no deaths. All people reported buying turtles from pet stores or receiving them as a gift.

Although previous *Salmonella* outbreaks were linked to turtles with a shell length less than four inches, those with illnesses in this outbreak have reported contact with red-eared sliders and other turtles that were larger than four inches in length.

All turtles, regardless of size, can carry *Salmonella* bacteria even if they appear healthy and clean. Animals with *Salmonella* shed the bacteria in their droppings. These germs can then spread to their bodies or items in their habitats, such as their tanks, food and water. People can become infected if they do not wash their hands after contact with animals carrying *Salmonella*, or their environments.

Most people infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps from six hours to six days after infection. Children under the age of five, senior citizens and individuals with weakened immune systems have a greater risk of infection and severe illness. The illness usually lasts four to seven days, and most individuals recover without treatment. However, in some cases, the illness may be so severe that a person requires hospitalization.

The CDC, PIJAC and other expert sources recommend these precautions to protect yourself and others from contact with *Salmonella* bacteria that turtles may carry:

- Supervise children’s interactions with the animal, including post-encounter hand-washing.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with water and soap right after touching the animal or anything in the area where they live, including after handling pet food and treats, cleaning cages or tanks, or picking up toys or bedding.
- Do not let the animal into areas where food is prepared, served, or stored.
- Do not snuggle or kiss the animal, or touch your mouth, eat or drink around them.
- To prevent cross-contamination, avoid cleaning habitats, toys and pet supplies in areas where food is prepared, served or stored.

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council reminds businesses and consumers that federal law¹ prohibits the sale of turtles with a shell length of under four inches as pets. Consumers should only purchase pets from reputable pet stores or breeders.

Pet retailers are strongly encouraged to provide information on disease risk and prevention measures to consumers purchasing reptiles. Such information includes the “Healthy Herp Handling” poster, which can be found listed in the resources below.

Resources:

- CDC investigation notice: <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/oranienburg-10-19/index.html>
- CDC information on *Salmonella*: <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/index.html>
- CDC Stay Healthy Around Pet Reptiles and Amphibians: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/resources/safety-around-reptiles-H.pdf>
- CDC The Trouble with Tiny Turtles: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/publications/trouble-with-tiny-turtles.html>
- CDC Information on Healthy Pets and Healthy People: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.html>
- PIJAC Healthy Herp Handling poster: <https://pijac.org/HealthyHerpHandling>
- PIJAC flyer containing information on *Salmonella* for retailers: <https://pijac.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/FLYERSalmonellosis071117.pdf>
- PIJAC Introduction to Aquatic Turtle Care: <https://pijac.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/care%20sheets/aquaticturtlecaresheet122117.pdf>
- PIJAC website updates on this outbreak and other zoonotic issues: <https://pijac.org/animal-welfare-and-programs/zoonotic-disease-prevention>

¹ Code of Federal Regulations:
<https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcfr/CFRSearch.cfm?fr=1240.62&SearchTerm=turtles%5d>