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Investigation Notice: Multistate Outbreak of *Salmonella* Infections Linked to Pet Hedgehogs

March 29, 2019 – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today announced that an additional six people and three states have been added to their investigation of a multistate occurrence of human *Salmonella typhimurium* infections linked to contact with hedgehogs.

To date, 17 people infected with the outbreak strain of human *Salmonella* Typhimurium infections have been reported in 11 states between Oct. 22, 2018, and March 1, 2019. Of 15 people interviewed, 13 reported contact with hedgehogs before becoming ill. The outbreak strain was identified in samples collected from eight hedgehogs in Minnesota, including three hedgehogs from two ill patients' homes.

The ages of those infected range from two to 95, with a median age of 13. Two people have been hospitalized; there have been no deaths. Ill people reported buying hedgehogs from different sources, including breeders, retail and online. A common supplier has not been identified.

Most people infected with *Salmonella* develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps between 12 and 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts four to seven days, and most individuals recover without treatment. Children under the age of five, senior citizens and individuals with weakened immune systems have a greater risk of infection and complications.

Animals become infected with *Salmonella* through their environment, by eating contaminated food, or from their mothers before they are born or hatched. Many animals can carry *Salmonella* and still appear healthy and clean. Animals with *Salmonella* shed the bacteria in their stool which can contaminate their body parts or items in their habitat, such as bedding, food, or water. People can be infected if they do not wash their hands after contact with animals carrying *Salmonella* or their environment.

The CDC and expert sources recommend these precautions to protect yourself and others from contact with *Salmonella* bacteria that small mammals, including hedgehogs, 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 picking up bedding.
- Do not let the animal into areas where food or drink 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, do not bathe animals or clean their cages or bowls in the kitchen sink, bathroom sinks or bathtubs. For bathing, use a container dedicated for that

purpose. If you must use a kitchen or bathroom space to clean the habitat, disinfect thoroughly afterwards.

The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council reminds consumers that they should check their state, local, and property laws before buying any small mammal, to make sure it is legal to own one in their community. Consumers should only purchase pets from reputable pet stores or breeders. Pet retailers are encouraged to provide information on disease risk and prevention measures to consumers purchasing pets.

Resources:

- CDC investigation notice: <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/typhimurium-01-19/index.html>
- PIJAC flyer containing information on *Salmonella* for retailers: <https://pijac.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/FLYERSalmonellosis071117.pdf>
- CDC advice on how to prevent diseases associated with small mammal pets that can cause human illness, including hedgehogs: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/small-mammals/index.html>
- CDC information on *Salmonella*: <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/>
- PIJAC health alerts on zoonotic diseases: <https://pijac.org/animal-welfare-and-programs/zoonotic-disease-prevention/healthalerts>
- PIJAC website updates on this outbreak and other zoonotic issues: <http://www.pijac.org/>
- CDC information on outbreaks of zoonotic diseases spread between animals and humans in the United States: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/outbreaks.html>