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Risk for zoonotic *Salmonella* transmission from pet reptiles: A survey on knowledge, attitudes and practices of reptile - owners related to reptile husbandry

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Salmonellosis is an extremely important reptilian zoonosis. Prevalence of chelonian salmonellosis because of poor hygiene precautions when handling reptiles, the age group most at risk of salmonellosis is children. In 1970s it was estimated that 4% of American families owned turtles and that 14% of all human salmonellosis cases in the United States (about 100,000 cases per year) were the result of infection from that source. Dessi & Pagli (1992) suggest that 12%–22% of salmonellosis cases in the United States originated in turtles and describe a convincing case of zoonosis involving a pet turtle, a small child and her mother. Bolser (1988) points out that, hypothetically, pet turtles may become infected with *Salmonella* by their owners. Estimates of the percentage of turtles carrying salmonellosis in the United States have been 12.1%–85%, with high levels of environmental contamination in breeding ponds on turtle farms being implicated as sources of egg infection and so infection of hatchlings. Savage & Baker (1980) pointed out that the problem was not just restricted to the United States. Human cases involving turtles have also been confirmed in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Canada and Africa. In general, the isolation of *Salmonella* from chelonians is not associated with disease, but it may be a reflection of hygiene, housing, water quality and diet, with omnivorous species appearing to be greater sources of human infection than herbivorous species. *Salmonella* would appear to be an occasional normal inhabitant of the chelonian digestive tract. Isolates have also been recovered from eggs, ovaries and gall bladder. Excretion by previously silent carriers during stressful events such as relocation and dehydration has been demonstrated. There appears to be no obvious way to certify chelonians as being clear of Salmonella.

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