

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health district reports outbreak associated with reptiles

LAS VEGAS – The Southern Nevada Health District is alerting the public to the risk reptiles can pose in the wake of an investigation into six cases of salmonellosis (a potentially serious intestinal illness) in Clark County related to a multi-state outbreak reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Five of the patients were under the age of 5, and one adult has been reported ill. One patient was hospitalized, but has since recovered.

All six Clark County cases had contact with aquatic turtles that were kept as pets. *Salmonella* bacteria can be on the bodies of reptiles, even those that seem healthy. It can also be on cages, aquariums, terrariums, the water reptiles live or swim in and other containers that house them. Anything that reptiles touch should be considered a possible source of *Salmonella*. People develop the infection by ingesting the bacteria. This is likely to occur if they touch a contaminated source then put their hands into their mouth or touch their food.

It is important for the public to know that contact with reptiles (such as turtles, iguanas, snakes, and lizards) can be a source of human *Salmonella* infections. Small turtles, with a shell length of less than 4 inches, are a well known source of human *Salmonella* infections, especially among small children. Most people infected with the bacteria develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps. The illness typically lasts from 4 to 7 days. Although most people recover without treatment, severe infections may occur. Infants, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems are more likely than other to develop severe illness.

People can reduce their risk and their children's risk of contracting salmonellosis if they avoid contact with reptiles. If choosing to keep a reptile as a pet the risk can be reduced by:

- Washing hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching or feeding reptiles, anything in the area where they live and roam, or water from their housing and habitats.
 - Adults should supervise hand-washing of young children.
 - Use soap and water whenever available. If soap and water are not readily available, immediately use a hand sanitizer and wash hands thoroughly as soon as possible.
- Keeping reptiles out of kitchens and other areas where food and drinks are prepared, served or consumed.

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Outbreak associated with reptiles – add one

- Cleaning tanks, feeding and watering containers, and any other equipment or materials used when raising and caring for reptiles outside the house. Be aware the equipment and materials, including the tank water, can be contaminated with *Salmonella* and other germs.

Some important “Don’ts” to remember:

- Don’t let children younger than 5 years of age, older adults, or people with weak immune systems handle reptiles.
- Don’t keep reptile habitats in a child’s bedroom, especially if the child is younger than 5 years of age.
- Don’t let reptiles roam free in your home.
- Don’t bathe animals or their habitats in your kitchen sink. If bathtubs are used for these purposes, they should be thoroughly cleaned afterward. Use bleach to disinfect a tub or other place where reptile habitats are cleaned.

Outbreaks of disease have been associated with a variety of animals, not just reptiles, including, amphibians (frogs and toads) and baby chicks. It is important to take proper precautions and to always supervise children when handling pets and to ensure proper hand hygiene. More information can be found on the CDC’s website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/>.

Updated information about the Southern Nevada Health District can be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict, on YouTube www.youtube.com/SNHealthDistrict or Twitter: www.twitter.com/SNHDinfo. The health district is now available in Spanish on Twitter www.twitter.com/TuSNHD. Don’t have a Twitter account? Follow the health district on your phone by texting “follow SNHDinfo” to 40404.