



Public Health

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Champaign-Urbana Public Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 29, 2013

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Small Turtles Can Cause Life-Threatening Disease

Champaign-Urbana Public Health District Urges People Not To Purchase Small Turtles

Champaign, IL – The Champaign-Urbana Public Health District urges people not to purchase turtles with shells of less than 4 inches. With exotic pets becoming more popular, it is important to know how to stay safe and healthy. Reptiles and amphibians often carry *Salmonella* on their skin and shells. The bacteria do not make them sick, but can make people very sick. Small turtles are a significant source of Salmonellosis - *Salmonella* infections. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), since 2011, a total of 391 persons infected with the outbreak strains of *Salmonella* have been reported from 40 states and the District of Columbia. Twenty-nine percent of ill persons have been hospitalized; no deaths have been reported. The eight multi-state outbreaks have been linked to small turtles.

Salmonella infections are specifically linked to small turtles because of those who are at risk for infections. For most healthy adults, Salmonellosis causes diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps that can last from four to seven days and resolves without treatment. Serious cases of Salmonellosis require hospitalization and can be life-threatening unless treated promptly. Symptoms generally appear within six to 72 hours of contact. People considered to be high-risk are infants, young children, the elderly and anyone with impaired immune systems. Infants and young children often put the small turtles in their mouth or put their fingers in the tank water and then into their mouth causing contamination. This was the reason for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ban the sale of all turtles and tortoises with a shell length of less than 4 inches.

“As a parent who experienced a *Salmonella* attack from a pet turtle on my son when he was 5 years old and hospitalized, I urge all parents to return any pet turtles from where they were purchased. There are no *Salmonella-free* turtles. There have been instances of death from this infection in young children associated with these turtles,” said Alan Kurtz, Champaign County Board Chair.

In recent years, *Salmonella* outbreaks have also been linked to aquatic frogs like the African Dwarf Frog. It is important to remember that it isn't just small turtles but all reptiles and amphibians. If you have reptiles or amphibians as pets and develop signs of a *Salmonella* infection (fever, diarrhea and abdominal cramps), please contact your doctor.

Turtles, and other reptiles and amphibians, can make great pets as long as precautions are taken. These animals should be kept away from young children, infants, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. Do not buy turtles or tortoises of less than 4 inches and wash your hands thoroughly after touching the animals or their housing.

Additional sources of information can be found on the FDA website:
<http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm048151.htm>

For more information, visit CUPHD on the web at www.c-uphd.org or follow us on Twitter and facebook.

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