

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #198 - Salmonella Infection Associated with Contact with Reptiles and Amphibians - 04/23/07

SUMMARY

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have reported ongoing multi-state outbreaks of Salmonella Pomona and Salmonella Typhimurium associated with exposure to pet reptiles.
- The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) is asking providers to consider Salmonella infection when evaluating patients with diarrhea, with or without abdominal cramps, and to ask about reptile and amphibian exposure. Specimens should be collected from suspect cases for bacterial culture.
- Reptile and amphibian owners, parents, and persons with compromised immune systems should be counseled about the risk of contact with reptiles/amphibians and salmonellosis.
- Suspect or confirmed human cases of salmonellosis should be reported promptly to the Erie County Department of Health.

BACKGROUND

The CDC and FDA have identified an outbreak of Salmonella Pomona associated with pet turtles. Recently, a 4-week-old infant in Florida died of Salmonella Pomona infection; investigation revealed a pet turtle infected with an identical Salmonella Pomona strain. Human and turtle isolates matching the outbreak strain have been identified in several states.

Additionally, CDC has identified a cluster of Salmonella Typhimurium infections among owners of pet snakes. Human and snake isolates matching the outbreak strain have been identified in several states. It is currently unclear if the source of infection is the snakes or rodents fed to the snakes.

Though no cases in Erie County have been linked to this outbreak, the NYSDOH and three county health departments are investigating cases of Salmonella Pomona and Salmonella Typhimurium in collaboration with the CDC and FDA.

The NYSDOH is asking providers to consider Salmonella infection when evaluating patients with gastrointestinal illness. The patient should be asked specific questions regarding reptile/amphibian contact and handling. Specimens should be collected from suspect human cases for bacterial culture.

Salmonella AND REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS - PREVENTION MEASURES

Reptiles and amphibians (including but not limited to turtles, tortoises, snakes, iguanas, chameleons, geckos, other lizards, frogs, toads, and salamanders) have been associated with human Salmonella infections. Reptiles and amphibians are frequently infected with Salmonella and shed the bacteria intermittently in their feces. Attempts at eradicating colonization in reptiles and amphibians is generally unsuccessful and may lead to antimicrobial resistance. Salmonella

survives well in the environment and can be isolated for prolonged periods from surfaces contaminated from reptile and amphibian feces; even minimal contact with reptiles and amphibians can result in illness.

CDC and other professional organizations recommend careful handling of reptiles and amphibians, including thorough hand washing after handling or feeding, keeping reptiles and amphibians and their habitats away from the kitchen or other food preparation areas, and not allowing reptiles and amphibians to roam freely in the house.

The elderly, infants, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely to have severe illness. Such individuals should avoid any contact with reptiles and amphibians. Reptiles and amphibians should not be present in households with persons with impaired immune systems, with children under the age of 5 years, or households expecting an infant. Children aged 5 and older should be carefully supervised while handling reptiles or amphibians and should wash their hands thoroughly after contact with the animals.

REPORTING

Any identified human cases of Salmonella infection among Erie County residents should be reported promptly to the Erie County Department of Health at (716) 858-7697 or the local county health department where the patient resides. If the patient resides outside New York State, please notify the NYSDOH Regional Epidemiology Program at (518) 473-4439.