

Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Pet Bearded Dragons



Investigation Notice

Posted January 11, 2022

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 44
- Hospitalizations: 15
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 25
- Investigation status: Active



Bearded Dragons and *Salmonella*

Bearded dragons can carry *Salmonella* germs in their droppings even if they look healthy and clean. These germs can easily spread to their bodies and anything in the area where they live and roam.

You can get sick from touching your bearded dragon or anything in its environment and then touching your mouth and swallowing *Salmonella* germs.

What You Should Do

Always take these steps to [stay healthy around your pet bearded dragon](#):

- **Wash your hands**

- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching or feeding your bearded dragon and after touching or cleaning the area where it lives and roams.
- Adults should make sure young children are [washing their hands](#).

- **Play safely**

- Don't kiss or snuggle your bearded dragon, and don't eat or drink around it. This can spread *Salmonella* germs to your mouth and make you sick.
- Keep your bearded dragon out of your kitchen and other areas where you eat, store, or prepare food.

- **Keep things clean**

- Clean your bearded dragon supplies outside the house, if possible. These supplies may include its feeders, toys, and food and water containers.
- If you clean the supplies indoors, don't clean them in the kitchen or other areas where you eat or prepare food. Use a laundry sink or bathtub, and thoroughly clean and disinfect the area right after.

If you are thinking of getting a pet bearded dragon:

- **Pick the right pet for your family**

- Bearded dragons and other reptiles are [not recommended](#) for children younger than 5, adults aged 65 and older, and people with weakened immune systems. These people are more likely to get a serious illness from germs that reptiles can carry.

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these severe *Salmonella* symptoms:

- Diarrhea and a fever higher than 102°F
- Diarrhea for more than 3 days that is not improving
- Bloody diarrhea
- So much vomiting that you cannot keep liquids down
- Signs of dehydration, such as:
 - Not peeing much
 - Dry mouth and throat
 - Feeling dizzy when standing up

What Businesses Should Do

- **Educate customers** about how to stay healthy around bearded dragons.
 - This [poster](#) provides information on how to stay healthy around pet reptiles, including bearded dragons.
 - Consider putting the poster right by the bearded dragon area and giving a copy to customers who are buying a bearded dragon.
 - This graphic can be used as a sticker and illustrates handwashing when handling pet reptiles, including bearded dragons.
- **Learn more** about how to protect your customers and employees from *Salmonella* infection and other diseases shared between animals and humans.
 - Read the [2017 Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings](#).

Symptoms of *Salmonella*

- Most people infected with *Salmonella* experience diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps.
 - Symptoms usually start 6 hours to 6 days after swallowing the bacteria.
 - Most people recover without treatment after 4 to 7 days.
- Some people – especially children younger than 5 years, adults 65 years and older, and people with weakened immune systems – may experience more severe illnesses that require medical treatment or hospitalization.

Investigation Details

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CDC and public health officials in several states are collecting [different types of data](#) to investigate a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Uganda infections.

Epidemiologic and laboratory data show that contact with bearded dragons is making people sick.

Epidemiologic Data

As of January 10, 2022, a total of 44 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Uganda have been reported from 25 states. Illnesses started on dates ranging from December 24, 2020, to December 2, 2021.

Sick people range in age from younger than 1 to 84 years, with a median age of 27, and 8 ill people were children under the age of 5. Of 43 people with sex information, 27 (63%) are female. Of 37 people with information available, 15 (41%) have been hospitalized. No deaths have been reported.

The true number of sick people in an outbreak is likely much higher than the number reported, and the outbreak may not be limited to the states with known illnesses. This is because many people recover without medical care and are not tested for *Salmonella*. In addition, recent illnesses may not yet be reported as it usually takes [2 to 4 weeks](#) to determine if a sick person is part of an outbreak.

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the animals they came into contact with in the week before they got sick. Of 33 people interviewed, 21 (64%) reported owning or touching bearded dragons or their supplies. People reported getting their bearded dragons from various places, including pet stores and online.

Laboratory Data

Public health investigators are using the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that may be part of this outbreak. CDC PulseNet manages a national database of DNA fingerprints of bacteria that cause gastrointestinal illnesses. DNA fingerprinting is performed on bacteria using a method called [whole genome sequencing \(WGS\)](#). WGS showed that bacteria from sick people's samples are closely related genetically. This means that people in this outbreak likely became sick from contact with the same type of animal.

On November 19, 2021, Oregon Health Authority collected samples from a bearded dragon in a sick person's home for testing. WGS showed that the *Salmonella* on the animal is closely related to bacteria from sick people. This means that people likely got sick from touching bearded dragons.

Whole genome sequencing of bacteria from 44 people's samples and one bearded dragon sample did not predict any antibiotic resistance. Standard [antibiotic susceptibility testing](#) of two people's samples by CDC's [National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System \(NARMS\)](#) laboratory also found no resistance. Most people with *Salmonella* illness recover without antibiotics.

Public Health Actions

CDC advises that you always take steps to [stay healthy around your pet bearded dragon](#):

- Wash your hands
- Don't kiss or snuggle your bearded dragon
- Don't eat or drink around it
- Keep it out of the kitchen
- Keep its supplies and habitat clean