

Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Pet Bearded Dragons



Investigation Notice

Posted June 16, 2022

This outbreak investigation is over. Bearded dragons can carry *Salmonella* germs that can spread to you and make you sick. Always take steps to stay healthy around your bearded dragon.

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 56
- Hospitalizations: 19
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 26
- Investigation status: Closed



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 or food 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 must 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.

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

Posted June 16, 2022

This outbreak investigation is over. Bearded dragons can carry *Salmonella* germs that can spread to you and make you sick. Always take steps to stay healthy around your bearded dragon.

June 16, 2022

CDC and public health officials in several states investigated a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* Uganda infections. Epidemiologic and laboratory data showed that contact with bearded dragons made people sick.

As of June 16, 2022, this outbreak investigation is over.

Epidemiologic Data

A total of 56 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Uganda were reported from 26 states. The true number of sick people in this outbreak is likely

much higher than the number reported, and this 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*.

Illnesses started on dates ranging from December 24, 2020, to April 25, 2022.. Sick people ranged in age from less than 1 to 84 years, with a median age of 27, and 62% were female. Of 49 people with information available, 19 were hospitalized and no deaths were reported.

State and local public health officials interviewed people about the animals they came into contact with during the week before they got sick. Among 43 people who remembered the type of animal they were exposed to, 29 (67%) reported bearded dragons.

Laboratory Data

Public health investigators used the PulseNet system to identify illnesses that were 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 were closely related genetically. This means that people in this outbreak likely got sick from the same type of animal.

On November 19, 2021, and March 17, 2022, the Oregon Health Authority collected samples from bearded dragons in sick people's homes for testing and found the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Uganda. On April 5, 2022, the Connecticut Department of Public Health collected samples from a bearded dragon, its food, and environment in a sick person's home. A urine and stool (poop) sample from the bearded dragon as well as a sample taken from a bottle of calcium supplements that were being fed to the bearded dragon tested positive for the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Uganda. These testing results mean that people likely got sick from touching bearded dragons or things in their habitat.

Whole genome sequencing of bacteria from 56 people's samples, 4 animal samples, and 1 food sample did not predict any antibiotic resistance. Standard antibiotic susceptibility testing of bacteria from 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