

Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Small Turtles



Investigation Notice

Posted July 21, 2022

Many people in this outbreak purchased small turtles online before getting sick. Do not buy small turtles with shells less than 4 inches long. A federal law bans the sale of these small turtles as pets, because they have caused many *Salmonella* outbreaks, but they are sometimes available for sale online and at stores, flea markets, and roadside stands. Always take steps to stay healthy around your pet turtle.

Fast Facts

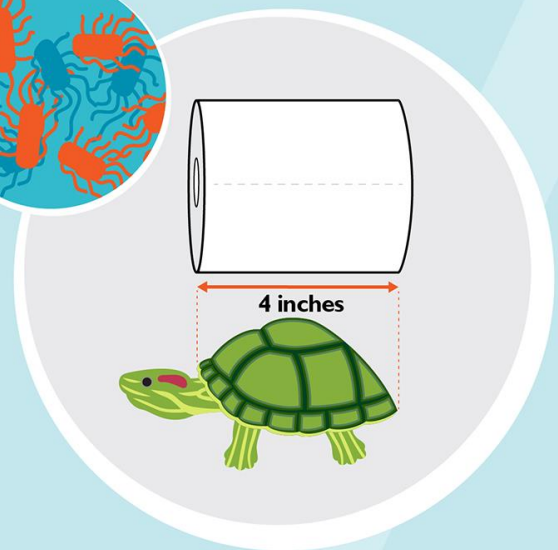
- Illnesses: 15
- Hospitalizations: 5
- Deaths: 0
- [States](#): 11
- Investigation status: Active

**DON'T BUY TURTLES
WITH SHELLS LESS
THAN 4 INCHES LONG.**

They are illegal to sell as pets because they caused many *Salmonella* outbreaks and made a lot of children sick.



www.cdc.gov/HEALTHYPETS



CS326558-A

Turtles and *Salmonella*

Many people in this outbreak reported purchasing turtles with shells less than 4 inches long from online stores before getting sick. Three people in this outbreak

purchased their turtles from a website called myturtlestore.com. The same strain of *Salmonella* making people sick in this outbreak was also found on turtles purchased from myturtlestore.com.

A federal law bans the sale and distribution of turtles less than 4 inches long as pets. However, these turtles can sometimes be found illegally online and at stores, flea markets, and roadside stands.

Pet turtles of any size can carry *Salmonella* germs in their droppings even if they look healthy and clean. These germs can easily spread to their bodies, tank water, and anything in the area where they live and roam.

You can get sick from touching your turtle or anything in its environment and then touching your mouth or food with unwashed hands and swallowing *Salmonella* germs.

What You Should Do

If you are thinking of getting a pet turtle:

- **Only buy turtles with shells longer than 4 inches and buy them from a reputable pet store**
 - Reputable pet stores do not sell turtles with shells less than 4 inches long.
- **Pick the right pet for your family**
 - Pet turtles 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 turtles can carry.

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

- **Wash your hands**
 - Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water right after touching or feeding your turtle and after touching or cleaning the area where it lives and roams.
 - Adults should make sure young children are washing their hands properly.
- **Play safely**

- Don't kiss or snuggle your turtle, and don't eat or drink around it. This can spread *Salmonella* germs to your mouth and make you sick.
- Keep your turtle out of your kitchen and other areas where you eat, store, or prepare food.
- **Keep things clean**
 - Clean your turtle supplies outside the house, if possible. These supplies may include its tank, toys, and feeders.
 - 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.

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

- **Do not sell or distribute turtles with shells less than 4 inches long.**
 - A federal law bans the sale and distribution of these turtles as pets.
- **Educate customers** about how to stay healthy around turtles.
 - This [poster](#) provides information on how to stay healthy around turtles.
 - Consider putting the poster right by the turtle area and giving a copy to customers who are buying them.
- **Learn more** about how to protect your customers and employees from *Salmonella* and other diseases shared between animals and humans.
 - Read [A Compendium of Measures to Prevent Zoonotic Diseases Associated with Non-Traditional Pets](#).

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 July 21, 2022

July 21, 2022

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

Epidemiologic, laboratory, and traceback data show that contact with small turtles is making people sick.

Epidemiologic Data

As of July 19, 2022, a total of 15 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Salmonella* Stanley have been reported from 11 states. Illnesses started on dates ranging from January 3, 2022, to June 24, 2022.

Sick people range in age from less than one year to 59 years, with a median of 7 years, and 71% of ill people are female. Of the 12 people with information available, 5 (42%) 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 the 9 people interviewed, 8 (88%) reported touching turtles. Of the 7 people

interviewed about the size of their turtle, 6 (86%) reported contact with a pet turtle with a shell less than 4 inches long. Of the 7 people interviewed about where they purchased their turtles, 6 (86%) reported purchasing their small turtles from online retailers. Of the 6 people who purchased their turtles online, 3 (50%) purchased from a website called myturtlestore.com.

Laboratory and Traceback 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 foodborne 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 got sick from the same type of animal.

On May 9, 2022, the Tennessee Department of Health collected samples from two small turtles in a sick person's home for testing. These turtles were purchased from myturtlestore.com. WGS showed that the *Salmonella* on the turtles and their environment are closely related to bacteria from sick people.

[WGS analysis](#) of bacteria from 14 people's samples, 3 turtle samples, and 3 environmental samples did not predict resistance to any antibiotics. One person's sample showed resistance to tetracycline. Most people with *Salmonella* illness recover without antibiotics. However, if antibiotics are needed, this resistance is unlikely to affect the choice of antibiotic used to treat most people. Standard [antibiotic susceptibility testing](#) by CDC's [National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System \(NARMS\)](#) laboratory is currently underway.

Public Health Actions

CDC advises that you always take steps to [stay healthy around your pet turtle](#): wash your hands, play safely, and keep supplies and the pet area clean. Do not buy small turtles with shells less than 4 inches long, including online from myturtlestore.com.