

Salmonella Outbreak Linked to Turtles

[Aug. 5, 2026, visit link for details.](#)

Animal safety alert

Investigation status: Open

Public health officials are investigating a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* infections linked to contact with pet turtles. All of the sick people are children younger than 10 years old. Although any turtle can carry *Salmonella* germs that can spread to you and make you sick, turtles with shells less than 4 inches long are a known source of illness. Always take steps to stay healthy around pet turtles.

Fast Facts

- **Cases:** 8
- **Hospitalizations:** 3
- **Deaths:** 0
- **States:** 6

Turtles and *Salmonella*

Cases

8

All of the sick people in this outbreak are children younger than 10 years old.

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 a turtle or anything in its environment and then touching your mouth or food with unwashed hands and swallowing *Salmonella* germs.

Urgent

A federal law bans the sale and distribution of turtles with shells less than 4 inches long as pets because they have caused many illnesses, especially in young children. Despite the ban, these turtles are sometimes still sold illegally online, at stores, flea markets, and roadside stands.

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, or people with weakened immune systems. These people are more likely to get a serious illness from germs that turtles can carry. Consider talking to a veterinarian before getting a turtle,

Always take these steps to stay healthy around your pet turtle:

Wash your hands

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water right after
 - touching or feeding your turtle
 - 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.
- Parents and caregivers of young children can consider taking additional precautions, such as changing shirts between holding turtles and holding infants.

Don't cross-contaminate

- Have a dedicated enclosure for your turtle. Don't allow turtles to roam in the same space where young children crawl and play.
- Keep turtles and their equipment out of the kitchen or anywhere that food is prepared, stored, served, or eaten.

Keep things clean

- [Clean your turtle supplies](#) outside of the house, if possible. These supplies may include its tank, 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.
- Pour any water from your turtle's enclosure down the toilet instead of sinks or drains.

If you decide pet turtles are not the right fit for your family:

- **Don't release your turtle outside.**

Call your local reptile rescue, animal shelter, or pet store about options for safely rehoming your turtle.

Releasing pets into the wild can disrupt wildlife and may be illegal in certain states.

Urgent

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

- Diarrhea and a fever higher than 102°F
- Diarrhea for more than 2 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.
- Many states have [additional laws](#) about the sale of turtles as pets.

Educate customers about how to stay health around turtles.

- [Learn more](#) information on how to stay healthy around turtles.

- Consider putting these stickers right by the turtle area and giving a copy to customers who are buying them.
 - [Always Wash Your Hands After Touching, Feeding, Or Playing With Your Pet Reptile](#)
 - [Don't Buy Turtles With Shells Less Than 4 Inches Long](#)
 - [Turtles Aren't Right For Every Family](#)

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.