

# Pet Reptiles and Salmonella: The Facts.....

There is small risk of salmonella infection associated with pets, such as reptiles, and any infection can be more serious in children and those with impaired immune systems. There may also be a risk associated with handling frozen or defrosted mice, rats or chicks which can also be contaminated. Reptiles, however, remain among the safest pets and the risk of infections is extremely small, actually probably far less than that posed by other common pets, such as mammals or birds or from common food items like chicken or meat.

**The risk of catching any infection can be significantly reduced by following some simple, common sense guidance. The UK's Health Protection Agency advice is:**

- Families with young children should be aware of the health risks associated with pet animals in general and the particular risks associated with having a reptile as a family pet
- Pets, including reptiles, should be kept out of kitchens and food preparation areas
- Kitchen sinks should not be used for bathing reptiles or cleaning reptile's dishes or vivariums. If bathtubs are used for these activities, they should be cleaned thoroughly with disinfectant
- Good hand hygiene practices should be employed at all times when handling and looking after any pet. This means that anyone handling a reptile or an object that has been in contact with a reptile should wash their hands thoroughly immediately afterwards to avoid contaminating other surfaces such as door handles
- Hand-washing after touching a reptile is particularly important before touching or feeding a baby, young child or immunocompromised person, as this could pose a risk to them
- It is recommended that you do not eat, drink or smoke while handling reptiles, their equipment or food

**Remember that you are far more likely to catch Salmonella from eating chicken than you are from a reptile or its food!**

# Guidance on feeding

Frozen rodents are the best way to feed your pet snake and some other types of reptiles. As the food items are raw and unprocessed there is always a possibility it may contain harmful bacteria. This is the same risk which applies to uncooked meats used for human consumption. By following this simple guidance you can significantly reduce any risk.

## Storage

Frozen rodents can be stored in the deep freezer for several months. Care should be exercised when storing frozen rodents and it is recommended they are stored securely wrapped in a polythene bag secured within a rigid, airtight plastic box. Care must be taken to ensure that frozen rodents never come into direct contact with human food.

## Defrosting

The best method of defrosting rodents is to allow them to defrost naturally at room temperature. Spread mice evenly over some newspaper or absorbent kitchen towels and cover with the same. Allow to defrost overnight or for several hours on a warm surface. Make certain the rodents are thoroughly defrosted before feeding. Carefully dispose of the newspaper after use and disinfect any surfaces which may have come into contact with the items.

**It is not recommended that rodents be defrosted in the microwave or in warm water**

## Feeding

It is recommended that defrosted rodents are offered to your pet by the use of long tweezers or forceps which are available from all good pet shops. This prevents fingers being nipped by 'enthusiastic feeders' and also further reduces the risk of contamination.

**Always thoroughly wash your hands and any equipment used in warm water and a suitable disinfectant after feeding, cleaning out or handling your pet**

