

Tourists face health risks from contact with captive sea turtles

February 5 2013

Tourists coming into contact with sea turtles at holiday attractions face a risk of health problems, according to research published today by *JRSM Short Reports*. Encountering free-living sea turtles in nature is quite safe, but contact with wild-caught and captive-housed sea turtles, typically through handling turtles in confined pools or through consuming turtle products, carries the risk of exposure to toxic contaminants and to zoonotic (animal to human) pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites. Symptoms, which may take some time to emerge, can resemble gastrointestinal disorders or flu but people more severely affected can suffer septicaemia, pneumonia, meningitis and acute renal failure.

The review included a case study of the Cayman Turtle Farm in Grand Cayman, which between 2007 and 2011 attracted approximately 1.2 million visitors. CTF sells farmed turtle meat to the public and local restaurants. One of the researchers, Clifford Warwick of the Emergent Disease Foundation, said: "The subsequent distribution of visitors exposed to turtle farm conditions may also involve opportunities for further dissemination of contaminants into established tourist hubs including [cruise ship](#) and airline carriers."

Warwick added that awareness of potential threats may be modest among health-care professionals and low among the public. "To prevent and control the spreading of sea turtle-related disease, greater awareness is needed among health-care professionals regarding potential pathogens and toxic contaminants from sea turtles, as well as key signs and

symptoms of typical illnesses."

The study was funded by the World Society for the Protection of Animals. Warwick said: "Significantly, the captive farming of turtles arguably increases the threat to health, in particular from bacteria, due to the practice of housing many turtles in a relatively confined space and under intensive conditions."

Warwick concluded: "People should avoid food derived from [sea turtles](#) and perhaps also other relatively long-lived species regardless of their role in the food chain as all these animals potentially have more time in which to accumulate hazardous organisms and toxins and present an increased risk of animal-linked human pathology."

Provided by SAGE Publications

Citation: Tourists face health risks from contact with captive sea turtles (2013, February 5)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2013-02-tourists-health-contact-captive-sea.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.