

Salmonella outbreak brings CDC warning over small turtles

August 23 2023, by Hunter Boyce, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



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Public health officials are currently investigating a multi-state outbreak of Salmonella, a bacterial disease that causes diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps. According to an August 2023 investigation notice by

the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there have been 26 illnesses and nine hospitalizations across 11 states due to a Salmonella outbreak caused by small turtles.

The outbreak has largely occurred along the eastern coast of the U.S., including Georgia, although cases of Salmonella linked to the turtles have been reported in California as well.

"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," the CDC reported. "Always take steps to stay healthy around your small turtles."

Turtles can carry Salmonella germs in their droppings, even those left by healthy pet turtles. The germs from the droppings can spread throughout their bodies and habitats, leaving anyone that touches them, their living spaces or their tank water at risk of becoming sick. The sale and distribution of pet turtles with shells less than four inches long—the [turtles](#) most at risk of spreading the disease—is consequently against federal law.

"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," the CDC reported.

If you have a pet turtle, the CDC advises that you should always wash your hands with soap and water after touching your turtle, feeding your turtle or cleaning its habitat. Do not kiss or snuggle your turtle, and do not eat or drink around the turtle. Don't let your pet turtle near your kitchen, and always keep your turtle's habitat clean.

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Citation: Salmonella outbreak brings CDC warning over small turtles (2023, August 23) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-08-salmonella-outbreak-cdc-small-turtles.html>

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