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## Health District Warns Residents of Health Risks Associated with Pet Turtles By Lori DiPietro, Health Educator

The Central Connecticut Health District is warning residents of the risk associated with pet turtles passing *Salmonella* bacteria to humans. Currently, there is a nationwide outbreak of infection, but no cases in Connecticut have been identified.

According to the Department of Public Health (DPH), young children are especially vulnerable to infection from small turtles that are sold as pets. Recently, street vendors have been identified as selling immature turtles, which have shells that are less than four inches.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are investigating a *Salmonellosis* outbreak associated with turtles in 27 states. Over 60% of ill individuals are children under the age of 10 and the majority of infected individuals reported contact with small turtles that were purchased from a street vendor. Although no Connecticut residents have been identified, there are cases confirmed in Massachusetts and New York.

When infected with *Salmonella* bacteria, individuals may experience the following symptoms: diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, headache, fever and/or abdominal pain six to 72 hours after exposure. Symptoms usually last two to seven days and most people recover without treatment. However, diarrhea may be severe and can lead to hospitalization as infection may lead from the bloodstream to the other parts of the body. Certain groups of people may be more susceptible to severe illness, such as the elderly, infants and those with impaired immune systems.

To prevent *Salmonella* infections, the following is recommended:

- Recognize the risk – reptiles with *Salmonella* germs can appear healthy and clean, but shed the germs in their droppings contaminating their bodies, tanks or aquariums, as well as the water.
- Remember that it is illegal to sell turtles with a shell less than four inches; vendors should be reported to local health departments or animal control officers.
- Don't let children under the age of 5, older adults or people with weakened immune systems handle or touch reptiles.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water right after handling reptiles or objects they were in contact with.
- Do not use kitchen sinks to empty or wash a reptile's tank or aquarium; if it is necessary to do so, thoroughly wash the sink or bathtub used to clean the tank or aquarium, and use bleach for disinfection.
- Do not allow the reptile to roam outside of its tank or aquarium.

For more information about *Salmonella* and pet turtles, please contact the Connecticut Department of Public Health at [www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph) or call (860) 509-7270. Any further questions may be directed to the Central Connecticut Health District, celebrating 15 years of service, at [www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org) or by calling (860)721-2822.