The Trouble with Tiny Turtles: An Illegal Pet

While many people enjoy keeping pet reptiles, some are riskier than others. Here is what you need to know about tiny turtles, a pet that is illegal to sell in the US.

ANY TURTLE CAN CARRY GERMS like Salmonella that can make people sick.

Fact: Salmonella causes a diarrheal illness that last 4-7 days for most people, but can be serious and lead to hospitalization, especially for kids and older adults.

Fact: People can get Salmonella infections from many different sources. One way is from touching certain animals, like turtles, their tank water, or the areas where they live and roam.

Fact: You can't see germs like Salmonella. Turtles can look healthy and clean but still carry germs. These germs can contaminate tank water and other areas.

Fact: There is good news! You can prevent Salmonella infections from turtles if you know the facts.

CONTACT WITH TINY TURTLES has caused large outbreaks of Salmonella infections.

From 2011-2013, 8 multistate outbreaks were linked to handling tiny turtles: 473 sick people in 41 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico. Age range from younger than one year old – 94 years old. 70% were children 10 years of age or younger. 69% of people said they have contact with a turtle before they got sick. 88% of people said the turtle had a shell length less than 4 inches. 50% of people said they did not know how to clean these little turtles.

IF YOU BUY A PET TURTLE buy one from a reputable pet store or breeder.

Although any size turtle can carry Salmonella, tiny turtles are especially risky. Since 1975, the sale of turtles in the US with shell lengths less than 4 inches has been banned by FDA. However, tiny turtles are still sold by street vendors, flea markets, and souvenir shops. Only buy turtles with shell lengths longer than 4 inches. Talk to the staff at a reputable pet store to learn more about pet turtles.

DON'T Toss YOUR TURTLE! Don't release unwanted turtles. Call your local reputable pet store or a reptile rescue.

HANDLE YOUR PET TURTLE SAFELY to keep your family healthy while enjoying your pet.

Fact: Always wash your hands after handling your pet or touching areas where they live and roam, especially tank water.

Fact: Don't bathe turtles or clean their tanks in your kitchen or bathroom. Do this outside, or use a tub or bin that is only used for your pet if you must do it inside.

Fact: Don't kiss or snuggle with your turtle. This can increase your risk of getting sick.

Turtles can be great pets, but aren't right for every family. Families that include these groups should consider a different pet:

- Kids younger than 5 years
- Older adults over the age of 65 years
- People with weak immune systems

Find out more at www.cdc.gov/healthypets