The Trouble with Tiny Turtles

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

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

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

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.

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, 473 sick people were linked to handling tiny turtles:
- 473 sick people in 41 states, DC, and Puerto Rico
- Ages ranged from younger than 1 year old – 94 years old
- While people of any age can get sick, average age 4 years old

FACT
70% of people remembered having contact with a turtle before they got sick.
31% of people said the turtle had a shell length less than 4 inches.
69% of people were infants younger than 1 year old.
88% of people were children 10 years of age or younger.

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.
- A playing card is 3 ½ inches long. 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.
- Always wash your hands after handling your pet or touching areas where they live and roam, especially tank water.
- 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.
- 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. Exercise that includes these groups should consider a different pet.

Find out more at www.cdc.gov/healthypets

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