Menu of State Turtle-Associated Salmonellosis Laws

Introduction
Turtles are often carriers of salmonella, which can cause serious salmonellosis infections in humans, particularly among vulnerable populations such as young children and the elderly. In recent years, salmonellosis outbreaks linked to pet turtles have increased throughout the United States.

Since 1975, the Food and Drug Administration has adopted regulations limiting the sale of small turtles with certain exceptions. Some states have exercised their own authority to establish laws that not only limit the sale of turtles but also regulate how turtles are sold, establish authority to test and destroy infected turtles, and limit the places where turtles may be kept. This menu addresses state and territorial laws regarding the sale of turtles, as well as other laws that limit turtle use and distribution.

Laws Banning the Sale of Small Turtles
Small turtles are often sold as pets for young children, who may view the turtles as toys and consequently kiss, lick, or place the turtles in their mouths as they might any other small object. Eighteen states ban the sale of small turtles. Some states incorporate the federal standard by reference while others explicitly ban the sale of small turtles below a certain size. Although the federal standard applies to all states, the preemption doctrine allows states to establish more stringent requirements than the federal regulation regarding the sale of turtles. Preemption issues are complex, but generally, if state requirements are less stringent, the federal law prevails. Some states select to enact their own laws to ensure that state resources can be used for enforcement or in the event that the federal standard changes.

Turtle Salmonella Outbreaks
In 2012, there were eight multistate outbreaks of turtle-associated salmonellosis in the United States and Puerto Rico. Four hundred seventy-three cases were reported resulting in seventy-eight hospitalizations. Seventy percent of those affected were children under the age of 10.

Want to learn more? Visit CDC’s turtle salmonella web page on the 2012 outbreaks.
Laws Incorporating the Federal Standard by Reference

**Federal** law states that “viable turtle eggs and live turtles with a carapace length of less than 4 inches shall not be sold, held for sale, or offered for any other type of commercial or public distribution.” Limited exemptions exist, such as use of turtles for “bona fide scientific, education, or exhibitional purposes, other than use as pets.”

Three states ban the sale of small turtles by incorporating the federal standard by reference. For example, **Illinois** law states that businesses “shall not possess or offer for sale turtle or viable turtle eggs which would constitute a violation of Section 264 of the Public Health Service Act (42 USCA 264), the rules for that Act (21 CFR 1240.62; 2005).” **Pennsylvania** also incorporates the federal standard: “No person shall sell, hold for sale or offer for any type of commercial or public distribution any live turtle or lot of turtles in this Commonwealth if the sale, holding for sale or offering for any type of commercial or public distribution of such turtle or lot of turtles is prohibited by Federal statute or regulation.”

**Four-Inch Rule**

Fourteen states ban the sale of turtles four inches or less. For example, **California** law makes it “unlawful to import, sell or offer for sale or distribution to the public any live turtle(s) with a carapace length of less than 4 inches.” **Indiana** adopted the four-inch rule, stating that “[a]n individual must not sell a turtle, regardless of species or origin, with a carapace less than four (4) inches long, except for a valid scientific or educational purpose.” Similarly, **Oregon** law states that “No turtles shall be imported into the State of Oregon with carapace lengths of less than four inches except: (a) Any governmental agency; (b) Any privately financed research group; (c) Zoos and wildlife exhibits.”

**Six-Inch Rule**

One state, **Arkansas**, bans the sale of small turtles six inches or less: “[No] person shall sell, offer for sale or distribute at wholesale, retail, or as a gift to the public, a live turtle or turtles, tortoise, terrapin under six inches long . . . in the State of Arkansas.”

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**Four-inches**

**Colorado** law makes it unlawful “[t]o sell, barter, exchange, or otherwise transfer, possess, import, or cause to be imported into this state . . . Any type of turtle with a length in carapace of less than four inches.” However, Colorado law provides “that a person may possess a turtle that the person has bred with a length in carapace of less than four inches.”

**Six-inches**

One state, **Arkansas**, bans the sale of small turtles six inches or less: “[No] person shall sell, offer for sale or distribute at wholesale, retail, or as a gift to the public, a live turtle or turtles, tortoise, terrapin under six inches long . . . in the State of Arkansas.”
**Laws Banning Sale of Turtles**

Two states, North Carolina and South Dakota, ban the sale of all turtles.\(^{21}\) **North Carolina** law states that "[n]o turtle shall be sold, offered for sale, or bartered by any retail or wholesale establishment in North Carolina."\(^{22}\) In **South Dakota**, "[a] person may not buy, sell, barter, or trade any species of turtle."\(^{23}\)

**Certified Salmonella-Free Laws**

Five states require that turtles sold within the jurisdiction be "certified salmonella free."\(^{24}\) The **District of Columbia** prohibits the sale of turtles and viable turtle eggs unless they can be "certified to be free" from *Salmonella*.\(^{25}\) Similarly, **Louisiana** law states that "[n]o person shall receive a shipment of turtles or turtle eggs into this state through the United States mail, or by any other means, from any other state or foreign country, unless such turtles or turtle eggs are accompanied by . . . [a] health certificate issued by a duly authorized veterinarian certifying that the turtles or turtle eggs are free from *Salmonella* Arizona, and any other species of bacteria which might be harmful to humans or other turtles."\(^{26}\)

**New Jersey** also requires that turtles four inches or larger are certified *Salmonella* free: "Live turtles of carapace length of four inches or greater shall not be sold or in any way distributed or offered for sale or distribution within the State unless the person or entity seeking to sell or distribute the turtles warrants to the satisfaction of the Department of Health and Senior Services that each shipment of turtles is free from *Salmonella* contamination."\(^{27}\)

**Authority to Test and Destroy Infected Turtles**

Seven states allow the state to test turtles for *Salmonella* and destroy infected turtles or turtle eggs.\(^{28}\) For example, **Connecticut** law specifies that, after a state or local health department examines a turtle tank, "[s]hould a single such examination show the presence of salmonella organisms all turtles in the tank shall be destroyed."\(^{29}\)

The **District of Columbia** allows the director of human services to "at any time take samples of tank water or any other appropriate method of sampling of turtles offered for sale or distribution and, after testing by a method deemed by the Director to be appropriate for the determination of the presence of bacteria, order the humane destruction of any turtle, lots of turtles, or turtle eggs found to be contaminated with bacteria of salmonella and Arizona genera or found to be held in water contaminated with those bacteria."\(^{30}\)

**Oregon** law states that "[t]he Department may take samples of turtles, tankwater
or other appropriate samples from turtles sold, distributed or given away and cause laboratory examinations to be made. In the event turtles, so sampled, are found contaminated with Salmonella, the Department may order the immediate humane destruction of any or all of the lot of turtles from which the samples were obtained.\textsuperscript{31}

**Laws Requiring Warnings, Instructions, or Other Materials**

Eight states and the District of Columbia require warning labels, health advisories, or other instructions in order to sell turtles.\textsuperscript{32} For example, District of Columbia law states that a “warning notice shall be posted conspicuously at every display of turtles for retail sale or distribution or where the public may handle turtles”\textsuperscript{33}

Under Connecticut law, “[n]o person may sell a live turtle with a carapace length of four inches or greater unless (1) a caution notice is posted by the person selling turtles which warns that the transmission of salmonella disease by turtles is possible; (2) at the time of the sale of the turtle, the seller furnishes the buyer with a copy of the caution notice and information obtained from a veterinarian regarding the proper care and feeding for the species of turtle which is being sold; (3) the buyer signs a form stating that he has read the notice provided if the buyer is less than sixteen years of age, such form shall be signed by a parent or guardian.”\textsuperscript{34}

New York also requires a warning: “The following warning must be posted conspicuously at every display of turtles for retail sale or distribution or where the public may handle turtles, unless the requirement is waived in writing by the State Commissioner of Health: ‘CAUTION: Turtles may transmit bacteria causing disease in humans. It is important to wash your hands thoroughly after handling turtles or material in a turtle bowl; not to allow water or any other substance from a turtle bowl to come in contact with your food or areas where your food is prepared; and to make sure that these precautions are followed by children or others handling turtles.’”\textsuperscript{35}

Similarly, Pennsylvania law states that “[i]nstructions designating the proper care and treatment of live turtles and information from [CDC] on human salmonellosis infection associated with reptiles shall accompany each retail sale of any turtle and shall be distributed to the purchaser by the seller thereof at the time of the sale.”\textsuperscript{36}

**Laws Specific to Vulnerable Populations**

States have also enacted laws that limit turtle exposure for vulnerable populations. This includes children in day care and other facilities and programs, as well as those seeking medical care in health and long-term care facilities.
Laws Pertaining to Children

Sixteen states limit turtle access around children.\textsuperscript{37} \textbf{Arizona} law bans turtles in childcare facilities: “A licensee shall ensure that a staff member . . . prohibits reptiles, such as turtles, iguanas, snakes, and lizards, in the facility.”\textsuperscript{38} \textbf{Delaware} law bans turtles from childcare facilities: “Animals such as ferrets, turtles, iguanas, lizards or other reptiles, psittacine birds (birds of the parrot family), or any other animals that are known to be carriers of illnesses shall not be kept at the Center.”\textsuperscript{39}

In \textbf{West Virginia} childcare facilities, “[l]ive animals, including birds and turtles, shall be excluded from food preparation, storage and serving areas, and in-use dining areas.”\textsuperscript{40} West Virginia law further states that childcare centers “shall not have on the premises ferrets, birds, reptiles, including snakes, lizards and turtles, or any wild or dangerous animals.”\textsuperscript{41} Additionally, West Virginia bans turtles in pre-K classrooms: “A WV Pre-K classroom shall not have on the premises ferrets, birds, reptiles, including snakes, lizards and turtles, or any wild or dangerous animals.”\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Mississippi} law requires confining turtles located in residential child care or child placing agencies: “An animal that is not aggressive, but could pose a threat to the health and safety of children such as, but not limited, to lizards, snakes, and turtles, shall be routinely confined (e.g., a cage or an aquarium) in an appropriate container.”\textsuperscript{43}

Laws Pertaining to Medical Facilities

Eight states and one territory limit turtle access in medical facilities.\textsuperscript{44} In \textbf{Guam}, turtles are excluded from nursing homes: “Live animals, including birds and turtles, shall be excluded from within nursing homes and from adjacent areas under their control except as specifically authorized by the Department.”\textsuperscript{45} \textbf{Idaho} law prohibits turtles in skilled and intermediate nursing care facilities: “Turtles are not permitted in the facility.”\textsuperscript{46} In \textbf{Tennessee}, turtles are prohibited in maternity homes: “Turtles shall not be kept as pets because (a) a proper environment is elaborate and difficult to achieve and (b) they are carriers of salmonella.”\textsuperscript{47} \textbf{Maine} law bans turtles in micropigmentation practitioner facilities: “Live animals, including birds and turtles, shall be excluded from the establishment, and from adjacent areas under the control of the license holder.”\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{Missouri} law also excludes turtles from food-preparation areas in long-term care facilities: “Live animals, including birds and turtles shall be excluded from the food storage service and preparation areas.”\textsuperscript{49} \textbf{Illinois} law excludes turtles from food preparation and

\begin{itemize}
  \item Keep turtles out of homes with children under age five, elderly persons, and those with weakened immune systems.
  \item Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching a turtle, its food or housing, or anything else that comes into contact with a turtle or its habitat.
  \item Watch for symptoms of \textit{Salmonella} infection, such as diarrhea, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, fever, and headache.
\end{itemize}

For more tips, visit the FDA’s Consumer Health Information page.
dining areas in community living facilities: “Live animals, including cats, dogs, birds and turtles, shall be excluded from all food preparation and dining areas.”

**Laws Prohibiting Turtles in Food Establishments**

Ten states prohibit turtles in food establishments. **Nevada** law states that “live animals, including birds and turtles, are not allowed on the premises of a food establishment or on adjacent areas under the control of the holder of the permit for the operation of the food establishment.” **New York** also prohibits turtles in food establishments, including in mobile food service operations: “Live animals, including birds and turtles, are to be excluded from food service operations.”

**Tennessee** law specifically excludes turtles in bed and breakfast food preparation areas: “No birds or turtles shall be permitted in food preparation areas.” Tennessee law also prohibits turtles in food establishments: “Live animals, including birds and turtles, shall be excluded from within the food service operational premises and from adjacent areas under the control of the permit holder.”

Finally, **West Virginia** law states that “[l]ive animals, including birds and turtles, shall be excluded from food preparation, storage, and serving areas and in in-use dining areas” in “all institutions and schools, care facilities, lodging facilities, recreational facilities, and public restrooms.”

**Acknowledgments and Disclaimers**

This document was developed by Aila Hoss, JD, Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education Fellow, and Don Benken, JD, MPH, Senior Public Health Analyst, with the assistance of Matthew Penn, JD, MLIS, Director, with the Public Health Law Program (PHLP) within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support. For further technical assistance with this resource list, please contact PHLP at phlawprogram@cdc.gov. PHLP provides technical assistance and public health law resources to advance the use of law as a public health tool. PHLP cannot provide legal advice on any issue and cannot represent any individual or entity in any matter. PHLP recommends seeking the advice of an attorney or other qualified professional with questions regarding the application of law to a specific circumstance. The findings and conclusions in this summary are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC.

*This menu includes states laws collected from WestlawNext between March 14, 2014, and April 22, 2014.*

*Published April 30, 2015. Updated 2016.*
## Appendix 1: Table on State Turtle-Associated Salmonellosis Laws

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Some states incorporate the federal standard by reference while others explicitly ban the sale of small turtles below a certain size. Although the federal standard applies to all states, the preemption doctrine allows states to establish more stringent requirements than the federal regulation regarding the sale of turtles. Preemption issues are complex, but generally, if state requirements are less stringent, the federal law prevails. Some states select to enact their own laws to ensure that state resources can be used for enforcement or in the event that the federal standard changes.
Appendix 3: Map of State Turtle Laws Targeting Vulnerable Populations

![Map of State Turtle Laws Targeting Vulnerable Populations]

- **American Samoa**
- **Guam**
- **Northern Mariana Islands**
- **Puerto Rico**
- **U.S. Virgin Islands**

**Types of Bans**
- Blue: Children
- Yellow: Individuals at Medical Facilities
- Red: Both

2. Eight Multistate Outbreaks of Human Salmonella Infections Linked to Small Turtles (Final Update), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (Oct. 18, 2013) http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/small-turtles-03-12/.


4. CDC’s Public Health Law Program (PHLP) collected state and territorial provisions that referenced turtles between March 14, 2014, and April 22, 2014, using WestlawNext, a legal research database. Provisions referencing reptiles or livestock generally were excluded from the assessment.


6. Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington. See ARK. ADMIN. CODE 007.10.25-II; CAL. CODE REGS. tit. 17, § 2612.1; COLO. REV. STAT. ANN. § 35-80-108(1)(j)(I); 8 COLO. CODE REGS. § 1201-11:25.00; CONN. GEN. STAT. ANN. § 19a-102a(b); ILL. ADM. CODE tit. 8, § 25.110(c); 312 IND. ADMIN. CODE 9-5-7.5; MD. CODE REGS. 08.03.11.07; MD. CODE REGS. 10.06.01.23; MICH. COMP. LAWS ANN. § 287.312; MISS. ADMIN. CODE 40-5:2.2; MONT. CODE ANN. 87-5-706(1)(f); N.H. CODE ADMIN. R. AGR. 1703.02; N.J. ADMIN. CODE § 8:23-2.1(a); N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 10 § 2.58(a); OR. ADMIN. R. 603-011-0420(1); 35 PA. CODE § 1071; TENN. COMP. R. & REGS. 1200-14-01-.36; UTAH ADMIN. CODE r. 657-53; and WASH. ADMIN. CODE 246-100-191(5).


8. Id.

9. 21 C.F.R. § 1240.62(b).

10. Id. § 1240.62(c).


22. 10A N.C. Admin. Code 41A.0302(b).
29. Conn. Agencies Regs. § 19a-36-A46(3).
35. N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 10, § 2.58(c).
ADMIN. CODE S DCF 251.07(7)(d); WIS. ADMIN. CODE S DCF 252.08(4); and WY RULES AND
REGULATIONS FAMS CCFS Ch. 9 s 4(b)(xx)(F).

41. Id. § 78-1-18.3.
42. Id. § 126-28-12.10.

Admin. Code 007.05.10-7(F)(2); Ark. Admin. Code 007.05.17-7(F)(2); 26 Guam Admin. R. &
Regs. § 6336(a); Idaho Admin. Code 16.03.02.202(02); Ill. Adm. Code tit. 77, § 370.1460(u);
10-144 Me. Code R. Ch. 211 § 3(C)(2); Mo. Code Regs. Ann. tit. 19, § 30-87.030(9); MONT.
ADMIN. R. 37.100.172; N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 10, § 702.6(a); and Tenn. Comp. R. &
Regs. 0250-04-07-.10. App. (J)(1).

45. 26 Guam Admin. R. & Regs. § 6336(a).
46. Idaho Admin. Code 16.03.02.202(02).
48. 10-144 Me. Code R. Ch. 211 § 3(C)(2).

Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, and
West Virginia. State laws specifically mentioning food establishments or preparation areas not
specific to a vulnerable population such as children or those receiving care at a medical facility.
See ALA. ADMIN. CODE r. 420-3-20, App. A; ARK. ADMIN. CODE 007.10.17-7; 410 IND. ADMIN.
CODE 7-15.5-52; NEV. ADMIN. CODE 446.625(1); N.J. ADMIN. CODE § T. 5, Ch. 27A, App. C,
8, Ch. 43, App. C, 8:43A App. C; N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 10 § 14-1.183; N.Y. COMP.
CODES R. & REGS. tit. 10 § 14-1.182; OR. ADMIN. R. 333-170-0020; TENN. COMP. R. & REGS.
1200-23-02-.03(2)(d); TENN. COMP. R. & REGS. 1200-23-01-.02(10)(p)(3); W. VA. CODE R. §

53. N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 10 § 14-1.183. See id. § 14-1.182 for the mobile food services
provision.
55. Id. 1200-23-01-.02(10)(p)(3).
57. Id. § 64-18-1. This may apply to vulnerable populations, such as children; however, given that
“children” was not specifically mentioned, it was categorized in the food establishments section.