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OKALOOSA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT URGES PET OWNERS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM SALMONELLA

FORT WALTON BEACH -- The Okaloosa County Health Department (OCHD) reminds pet owners of reptiles and amphibians to protect themselves from a potentially serious infection.

Salmonella can cause life-threatening infections in people, even though the bacteria do not make some reptiles and amphibians sick. An example of the potential danger is illustrated by the 2007 death of a four-week-old baby in Florida linked to *Salmonella* from a small pet turtle. The turtle's *Salmonella* DNA matched that from the infant.

People infected with *Salmonella* may have diarrhea, fever, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, and headache. Symptoms usually appear six to 72 hours after contact with the bacteria, and last about two to seven days. Most people recover without medical treatment, but some people get so sick that they need to be treated in a hospital.

OCHD urges pet owners to protect themselves:

- **DO NOT** allow reptiles/amphibians to roam freely through the house, especially in food preparation areas.
- **DO NOT** clean reptile/amphibian tanks or other supplies in the kitchen sink. **DO** use bleach to disinfect a tub (or other place) where pet habitats are cleaned.
- **DO** remove reptiles/amphibians from the home if your family is expecting a child.
- **DO** keep reptiles/amphibians out of homes with: people under 5 years old, people with weakened immune systems, or the elderly.
- **DO** wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching any reptile/amphibian, their housing, or anything (food, for example) that comes in contact with the pet or its housing.
- **DO** watch for *Salmonella* infection symptoms, such as: diarrhea, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, fever, and headache. **DO** call your doctor if these symptoms are displayed.

For additional information, please contact the OCHD's Environmental Health Department at 850-689-7859 or 850-833-9247.

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