

Pet Turtle Facts

There are two types of pet turtles: aquatic turtles, such as the popular Red Eared Slider, and land turtles, which include the Box Turtle species. Each type of turtle has different needs for food and housing. Turtles are usually sold as babies, but can grow to be more than 30 cm long. **Turtles are a “look at me!” pet.** They do not like being picked up or handled. But turtles can be fascinating to watch and with proper care some pet turtles can live for more than 50 years!



Getting A Turtle

It is very important to find out what turtles need and how to look after them before deciding to buy one. Once you have decided that a turtle is the right pet for you, be sure to choose a turtle that looks bright, alert, and active. Look for any obvious signs of illness such as eye or nose discharge, unhealthy skin or shell, or diarrhea. Check that any aquatic turtle floats horizontally side-to-side. Make sure that the enclosure where the turtle is kept is clean and that none of the other turtles look sick. Ask where the turtles came from - do not buy or capture a turtle from the wild, and never release a turtle you have bought into the wild.

Caring For Your Turtle

Feeding: Turtles need a wide variety of different foods, from mice to worms to insects, as well as vegetables and some fruit. Land turtles need to be fed differently than aquatic turtles. Commercial pelleted turtle feed is available, but it should only be used to make up a small portion of the animal's diet.



Aquarium/Terrarium: Turtles are cold-blooded animals that rely on their environment to regulate their body temperature. Turtle enclosures require special heating and lighting, and certain types of bedding/litter to ensure your pet stays healthy and happy. Aquatic turtles need an area to swim, and land turtles need a shallow dish of water to drink from and to soak in.

Handling Your Turtle: The best way to hold a small turtle is to grasp it on either side of the shell, midway between the front and back legs. Aggressive turtles, such as Snapping and Soft-Shell Turtles, should be held very carefully and a little further back on the shell. Handling should be minimized so the turtle does not become stressed and sick.

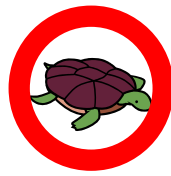
Additional Information: There are many websites on the internet that offer advice on turtle care, but not all of the information is accurate. It is often best to contact another person who is experienced with keeping turtles or other reptiles for advice. Your veterinarian can also give you advice about caring for your turtle.

Wash Your Hands!

Hand Hygiene: Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water after touching a turtle, touching anything a turtle has touched, or cleaning an aquarium/terrarium. It is important not to touch any parts of your own face, another person, or any objects or surfaces before washing your hands, as this can spread bacteria in the environment.

Turtle Bites: Turtles, like most animals, carry many bacteria in their mouths, so turtle bites should be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly as soon as possible with lots of soap and water, and watched closely for signs of infection. Also, try to figure out why the turtle tried to bite (e.g. scared, stressed, in pain) in order to avoid the same cause in the future.





Cleaning Up

Keeping your turtle's environment clean is essential to help prevent your turtle and you from getting sick. Do not leave uneaten food to spoil in the animal's enclosure. Turtles tend to defecate in water, so try to keep the water clean and fresh. Fecal pellets should be removed from the enclosure whenever possible with a scoop. Once a month, the entire aquarium/terrarium should be completely emptied and thoroughly cleaned with soap and water, and then disinfected with a solution of 10% bleach. The disinfectant should be left in contact with all surfaces for at least ten minutes and then thoroughly rinsed off. Large rubber storage containers make great terrariums and are easy to hose out and clean because they do not usually have any crevices or square corners where debris can be trapped. **Never wash a turtle or any object that has been in contact with a turtle in the kitchen or anywhere food might be prepared or kept.**

Is My Turtle Sick?

Signs of sickness in turtles include abnormal discharge in the mouth or from the nose and eyes, changes in skin or shell color, swellings on the legs or head, "shell rot", loosening of scutes (the plates that make up the turtle's shell) and diarrhea. Lack of appetite and decreased activity are often indicators of illness too, but they can also be the result of hibernation. Clean, healthy turtles should not have any significant odour. If the behavior or appearance of your turtle becomes abnormal, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible, because the longer the animal is sick, the harder it may become to treat it. In many cases turtles become sick due to an inadequate or inappropriate diet, but it is very important to rule out infectious diseases as well.

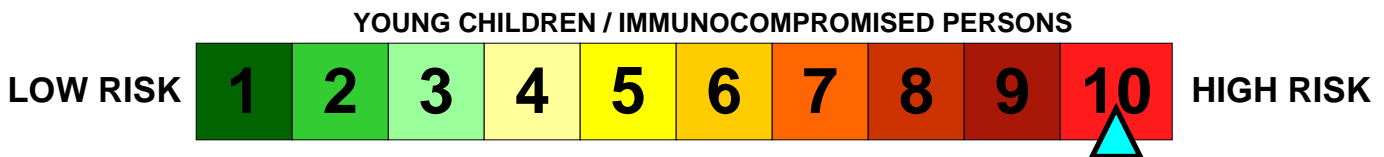
Can My Turtle Make *ME* Sick?



YES. The most frequent disease people get from turtles is salmonellosis, which is an infection caused by the bacteria *Salmonella*. Although *Salmonella* can also make your turtle sick, the majority of reptiles, including turtles, carry *Salmonella* as part of the normal bacteria in their intestine, and the animal may look completely healthy. Nonetheless, the bacteria can still make a person very sick. *Salmonella* may be found on any part of a turtle, not just in its stool. People catch *Salmonella* by swallowing it. With turtles, this usually happens because people get the bacteria on their hands and then touch their face or the food they are eating. *Salmonella* also survives very well on objects and surfaces in the house with which a turtle, or something touched by the turtle, has been in contact.

Salmonellosis usually causes diarrhea. Most people recover in a few days, but some people become very sick when the bacteria get into the bloodstream. In some cases, people have died from *Salmonella*. People can also get *Salmonella* from touching or eating undercooked food such as chicken that was contaminated with the bacteria during processing, and not from a turtle.

Young children are at an increased risk of catching *Salmonella* from a pet turtle, because they often do not wash their hands properly after touching a turtle, and they often put their fingers or objects in their mouths. **People who are immunocompromised** (e.g. HIV/AIDS patients, transplant recipients, cancer patients) are also more likely to get sick from *Salmonella* because their immune system cannot fight infections as efficiently. For this reason, reptiles including turtles should **NOT** be kept in the same household as these people. For these groups, turtles are:



For **healthy adults and older children**, the risk of getting *Salmonella* from a pet turtle is always present, but can be reduced by handling the animal as little as possible, restricting the turtle to its enclosure and not letting it roam, keeping the turtle and its enclosure clean, and using proper hand hygiene to decrease the spread of bacteria. For this group, turtles are:

