

Pet bearded dragons pose salmonella danger, CDC warns

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Lizards called bearded dragons may not breathe fire, but they can be a source of one nasty infection: Salmonella.

This warning came from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a health advisory on Friday, noting there have been reports of 15 salmonella illnesses linked to bearded dragons across nine states.

"Four people have been hospitalized," the agency said, although no deaths linked to the scaly pets have been reported.

The danger is most acute for young children, with 60% of the new cases reported in youngsters under the age of 5.

The very young and the elderly may be more vulnerable to these infections. For that reason, "bearded dragons are not recommended as pets for children younger than 5, adults aged 65 or older and people with weakened immune systems because these people are more likely to get a serious illness from germs that reptiles carry," the CDC said.

You can't tell if a bearded dragon is carrying the [salmonella bacteria](#) just by looking at it, since they "can carry salmonella [germs](#) in their droppings even if they look healthy and clean," the agency said.

Infections typically occur when a person handles or touches one of the [lizards](#) and then moves their hands to their mouth or food.

Still thinking about bringing home a tiny dragon? If you do, "wash your hands, play safely and keep things clean" when in contact with the lizard, and make sure kids under 5 don't handle your pet, the CDC advised.

Keep your dragon in its own enclosure, away from places [young children](#) might crawl or roam.

Salmonella can be a serious illness. According to the CDC, "most people infected with salmonella develop diarrhea, fever and stomach cramps 6 hours to 6 days after being exposed to the bacteria."

Illnesses typically last four to seven days. Most people will recover without treatment, but in some cases, the illness is so severe it requires [hospital care](#).

More information: Find out more about pet reptiles, amphibians and salmonella at the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#).

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