

Human Health Hazards Associated with Turtles Information for Regulators and Public Health Educators

The sale of turtles with a carapace length of less than 4 inches has been banned in the U.S. since 1975 because of the public health impact of turtle-associated salmonellosis. This regulation is enforced by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in cooperation with State and local health jurisdictions. Experts estimate that the regulation has prevented about 100,000 cases of salmonellosis per year. However, there has been an increase in the sale of turtles in recent years. FDA is providing this information for regulators and public health educators to underscore the need to address the illegal sale of baby turtles and to educate consumers about turtle associated-salmonellosis.

Regulation – Title 21, Part 1240.62 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* 21 CFR 1240.62 (b) and Compliance Policy Guide 7129.01

The regulation banning the sale of turtles with a carapace length of less than 4 inches is based on the Public Health Service Act (section 361) and is enforced by FDA in cooperation with State and local health jurisdictions. FDA also has a Compliance Policy Guide (CPG 7129.01 -- http://www.fda.gov/ora/compliance_ref/cpg/cpggenl/cpg170-100.html) that provides information to the FDA field staff on follow-up and enforcement of this regulation.

21 CFR 1240.62 (b) sales, general prohibition states:

(http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/12feb20041500/edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2004/aprqt/r/21cfr1240.62.htm):

Except as otherwise provided in this section viable turtles eggs or 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.

- Exemptions: 21 CFR 1240.62 (d)
The sale, holding for sale and distribution of live turtles and viable turtle eggs for bona fide scientific, educational, or exhibitional purposes, other than use as pets.
- Sales intended solely for export from the U.S.
- Sale of turtles and turtle eggs not in connection with a business

The illegal sale of turtles with a carapace length of less than 4 inches is subject to a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for not more than a year, or both, for **each violation**.

Potential Hazard/Salmonellosis

Salmonellosis is an infection of the intestines caused by bacteria called *Salmonella*. Anyone can get *Salmonella* infection, but the risk is highest in infants and young children as well as the elderly, and people who have lowered natural resistance to disease due to pregnancy, cancer,

Food and Drug Administration, Center for Veterinary Medicine
7519 Standish Place, HFV-12, Rockville, Maryland 20855
Telephone: (240) 276-9300 FAX: (240) 276-9115

chemotherapy, organ transplants, diabetes, liver problems, or other diseases. Symptoms of the disease may include diarrhea, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, fever and headache. Symptoms usually start within 6 to 72 hours after a person is exposed to *Salmonella*, and they generally last for 2 to 7 days.

Prevention

Salmonella are naturally occurring bacteria in turtles and those with *Salmonella* usually do not appear sick in any way. In addition, turtles do not shed *Salmonella* all of the time. So, just because a turtle might have one negative test for *Salmonella* doesn't mean that they are not infected. It could mean that the turtle was not shedding *Salmonella* on the day it was tested.

The public needs to recognize that turtles are a possible source of salmonellosis for humans; and that turtles are not suitable pets in households with young children or immunocompromised persons. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has conducted outreach efforts to provide risk information to the public via pet retailers. In addition, State and local health departments and the pet industry joint Advisory Council and the Humane Society have conducted education efforts. However, the level of public health awareness about the hazards of turtle ownership remains low.

Conclusion

The ban on the sale of turtles with a carapace* length of less than 4 inches is a necessary public health measure. FDA urges Agency field staff and State and local regulators and public health educators to help increase awareness of the ban and the human health risk associated with turtles. FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine has developed a flier for consumers on this subject which is posted on our Home Page at: <http://www.fda.gov/cvm/CVMConsumers.html> .

*Thick shell that covers the back of a turtle

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