

Advice to reptile owners amid Salmonella outbreak linked to feeder rodents

Scientists have again confirmed a link between Salmonella detected in feeder mice distributed by Monkfield Nutrition Ltd across all four UK nations, and an outbreak of human cases of Salmonella. The risk to the general public is considered to be very low but we are urging reptile owners who purchase certain feeder rodents for their pets to take extra precautions to avoid becoming ill with salmonellosis.

The feeder rodents affected, which were imported from Lithuania and are sold in a number of retailers, are typically fed to reptiles – particularly snakes.

Retailers must now by law provide customers buying the feeder rodents from Monkfield Nutrition Ltd with an information leaflet about the risks of Salmonella infection and advice on always washing their hands as a good hygiene practise for handling animal food in the home.

The FSA, which leads on the safety and regulation of animal feed, is working closely with public health and animal health agencies, as well as a range of other partners both inside and outside government. The Agency is also liaising with local authorities and with Monkfield Nutrition Ltd, who have contacted all of its customers to inform them of the additional requirements in the short term.

The outbreak was first investigated in 2015 and has so far resulted in almost 850 reported human cases, mostly but not exclusively, living in households with one or more pet reptiles.

Salmonella are bacteria found in the gut of many animals, especially reptiles. The bacteria can spread from carrier animals to cause illness in people. Though Salmonella infection in people usually causes short-term illness, with diarrhoea, fever, vomiting, and abdominal pain, more severe illness can occur.

It can have serious consequences, particularly for babies, small children, elderly people, and those with compromised immune systems, leading to hospitalisation in some cases.

Tina Potter, Head of Incidents at the FSA, said:

“We are advising pet handlers that they should follow good hygiene when handling feeder rodents and pet reptiles to avoid the risk of becoming ill with salmonella.

“Retailers must provide a leaflet explaining the risks associated with handling and feeding this type of material to reptiles and the importance of good hygiene with each sale of feeder rodents.

“This is aimed at ensuring pet handlers clearly understand the potential risks and have access to information to reduce the risks.”

“We will continue to monitor this situation carefully, and act proportionately to ensure both public and animal health.”

Dr Lesley Larkin, Surveillance Lead, Gastrointestinal Pathogens Unit at Public Health England, said:

“Epidemiological investigations and whole genome sequencing have again confirmed the link between a Salmonella outbreak in people who have become unwell and feeder rodents used to feed reptiles and some other animals distributed in the UK by this specific importer.

“Just as for handling raw human food, there is an inherent risk of Salmonella when handling raw or frozen and defrosted pet food such as mice, rats or chicks, as freezing does not kill Salmonella. In addition, most reptiles carry Salmonella in their intestines for months or even years after exposure to contaminated food, and this can spread to their owners and other household members. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after handling the frozen food and feeding your reptile, after handling your reptile, cleaning their vivarium or any other equipment such as soaking pools. Children should be supervised to ensure they wash their hands properly.”

For more information about Salmonella, [visit the FSA webpage](#).

For more information about symptoms of food poisoning, please visit [NHS.uk](#). Anyone who is concerned about symptoms should contact their GP or out of hours service in the first instance.

For further information on reducing the risks of Salmonella infection from reptiles, [see the Public Health England guidance](#), developed in partnership with FSA, Defra and the APHA.

Background

- If you or other family members become ill with symptoms such as diarrhoea, abdominal pain and fever, consult your doctor or NHS 111 and inform them that you own/keep a reptile. If you have symptoms, make sure you wash your hands regularly and avoid preparing food for others. Do not go to work or school until 48 hours after symptoms have passed in order to reduce the chances of passing on the infection.