

- **Salmonella meningitis is a very rare form of meningitis caused by salmonella bacteria.**
- **From 1975 to 1991, it accounted for 0.9% of cases of bacterial meningitis in newborn babies and 0.2% of cases of bacterial meningitis at other ages*.**
- **Those affected are mostly newborn babies, but cases may also occur in immunodeficient adults.**
- **Babies born prematurely, with low birth weight, or after prolonged labour have a higher risk of most forms of neonatal (newborn) meningitis.**

There are many kinds of Salmonella bacteria which often cause food-poisoning. Infection with Salmonella is very rarely life-threatening.

In a few rare cases, an unusual form of salmonella meningitis has been transmitted to babies, pregnant women and immunodeficient adults by pet reptiles. This is more widely known in the US where pet reptiles are more popular. The Chief Medical Officer for England issued advice on this in February 2000 after the death of a baby from *Salmonella rubislaw* meningitis, probably contracted from the family's pet water dragon. The advice follows:

- Children less than five years old, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with lowered immunity should avoid contact with reptiles.
- Babies under one year of age are especially at risk from direct and indirect contact with reptiles.
- Always wash hands with hot, soapy water after contact with reptiles, reptile cages, equipment or faeces. Children should be supervised when handling reptiles to prevent hand-to-mouth contact.
- Reptiles should be kept away from food and kitchens. Kitchen sinks should not be used to bathe reptiles, or wash their cages, dishes or aquariums. Bathtubs should be cleaned and disinfected with bleach afterwards if they are used for this.
- If you have a pet reptile, consider keeping it in its cage or limiting the parts of the house where it is allowed to roam free.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling reptiles or their equipment.

(*Neonatal meningitis in England and Wales: a review of routine national data. Mary B Synnott, Dale L Morse and Susan M Hall. Archives of Disease in Childhood 1994; 71:f75-f80)

[Where can I go for further information and support?](#)

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