



News Release

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Contacts: Tim Church, Communications Office
Donn Moyer, Communications Office

360-236-4077
360-236-4076

Seven *Salmonella* cases in WA linked to contact with hedgehogs

National outbreak highlights the need for safe handling of hedgehogs and other pets

OLYMPIA — Seven cases of *Salmonella* infection in Washington residents have been linked to a national outbreak traced to contact with hedgehogs. The Department of Health is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Agriculture (USDA), and other states to investigate *Salmonella* illnesses associated with hedgehogs.

The seven *Salmonella* illnesses linked to exposure to hedgehogs, including one death, were reported to the Department of Health over the past year. Tests have shown the specific type of *Salmonella* matches that found in 20 people from seven other states across the country.

Pet hedgehogs can carry *Salmonella* and other diseases, even if the animals do not appear to be sick. People can be infected during routine pet care for their pet hedgehogs, which can shed bacteria that can contaminate cages, toys, bedding, or household surfaces. Even without touching a hedgehog, people can be infected by touching objects contaminated by infected hedgehogs.

The Department of Health recommends that hedgehog owners make sure to wash hands with soap and water after handling the animals and their cages, toys, bedding, water bottles, food, and any other materials used for pet care. In addition, be sure to clean any surfaces potentially contaminated by hedgehogs. Hedgehog owners should also be sure to warn friends and family about the risk of *Salmonella* and make sure all people having contact with their pet hedgehog wash their hands, too. Many kinds of animals can shed *Salmonella* bacteria, and these prevention strategies should be used when handling and caring for any animal.

Salmonellosis symptoms can include severe diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, fever, chills, abdominal discomfort, and occasionally vomiting; symptoms may appear one to three days after exposure.

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Infections can last from several days to months. The illness can be treated, though most people recover on their own, without medications.

Young children, elderly adults, and people with weakened immune systems have a higher risk for severe illness. Adults should supervise children when washing hands. Cages should be washed outdoors instead of in a kitchen or bathroom. The animals don't always show signs of illness, so it's important to take steps to protect yourself.

The cases in Washington have come from King, Pierce (2), Thurston, Whitman, Clark, and Spokane counties.

Before this year, the Department of Health had one reported case of *Salmonella* related to hedgehogs in 2005.

The department's website has more information on [Salmonella illness prevention](#) and the [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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