

Can my pet reptile make me sick?

It is always possible that you can contract diseases or parasites from your reptile. Diseases that can be transmitted from pets to humans are known as zoonotic diseases. Some examples are *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, protozoa and even tuberculosis. Worm parasites can also be common.

There are a few simple things that you can do to minimize your risk. Washing your hands thoroughly after handling your pet is always a good practice. It is also recommended that you wear gloves and face protection when washing your reptile's cage. Never clean their cage or equipment in a kitchen or bathroom used by humans. Thankfully, the risk of actually contracting a disease is small if you wash your hands after handling. Those humans that are at higher risk include the young and the immune-compromised. If there are children in the house, always supervise them around reptiles. Generally, reptiles can make great pets, but just take the extra precautions to make your environment and theirs a healthy place to live.

Why is my baby iguana or tortoise not growing?

If your pet seems to be demonstrating stunted growth it is possible that they may have a calcium deficiency and if severe enough, this can lead to Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD). It is fairly common in sick reptiles and results from a diet unbalanced in calcium, phosphorous, Vitamin D and even protein. You might notice deformities in their bones, swollen legs and jaws or lameness. All of these things are cause for concern and an appointment should be made with your veterinarian to begin treatment.

Should my turtle or tortoise hibernate?

Yes. Winter is the time when many species of turtles and tortoises require a 2-3 month hibernation period. Hibernation needs vary from species to species but the following includes basic information on a few common species. Desert tortoises can be provided a cardboard box if indoors or a doghouse if outdoors. Provide appropriate insulation like leaves or shredded newspaper. Some might create burrows for themselves. Water turtles, if kept indoors and in heated enclosures, will stay active all year but if kept outdoors, might retreat from the water and burrow into piles of leaves. Box turtles, if outside will bury themselves at least halfway into the soil. If indoors, supply a "hibernation box"; a cardboard box with holes punched in the sides and filled halfway with moist soil or peat moss.

During hibernation the body processes slow down tremendously, so it is not recommended to allow a sick or injured turtle or tortoise to hibernate. Circulation will reduce and the immune response will slow or even stop, allowing diseases they were harboring to worsen.

How long can I leave a live rat in with my snake?

If you are feeding live rats/mice, it is never a good idea to leave it in with your pet unsupervised. If your snake does not eat its live prey right away, it is possible that your snake could be harmed. If you must feed live rats/mice they should be "stunned" first, but this is usually unpleasant for most people. An alternative to this is to feed frozen/thawed prey.

If an injury does occur, please give us a call, as it is likely your pet will need an exam and treatment.

Why do I need special lighting for my pet?

Various lighting strategies attempt to replicate (as best as possible) your reptile's natural habitat. Depending on the type of reptile, in the wild require sources of heat and different forms of ultraviolet (UV) light. Be sure to do your research to understand exactly what type of lighting your reptile needs. More information can be found at www.anapsid.org.

Daytime heating should be supplied in the form of an overhead source. Incandescent bulbs, reptile basking lamps and infrared heat lamps are good options. Nighttime light might also be necessary. Do not offer any white or bright light during the night as it can disrupt sleep cycles and cause stress. Instead offer a nocturnal light that is very dim. UVA subtly affects the way colors look for reptiles and can change their activity if not offered. UVB is important for the synthesis and uptake of vitamins.

Make sure you have multiple temperature gauges in the enclosure. Placement is crucial to ensure that areas are not too hot or too cold. Proper lighting strategies are necessary for heat, metabolism and the overall health of your reptile.