

EXOTIC PETS

HYGIENE AND CAUTIONS

IMPORTANT: Hygiene measures, such as hand-washing, where performed thoroughly and with correct chemicals, can significantly reduce the amount of germs on your hands but *does not* guarantee protection against becoming sick or remove the possibility of passing germs directly or indirectly to others.

Advice included here can help to *reduce* but not *eliminate* the risk of contracting illness from exotic pets.

Ownership of exotic as pets such as fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals such as raccoons and primates involve special risks to the health of animal keepers and to the health of those around them. *It is not advisable to keep exotic animals as pets.* Many people, however, already have exotic pets, and this most likely causes thousands of cases of human illness annually and occasional deaths.

It is important to note that because exotic pets occupy the home, and that germs are easily spread around surfaces, walls, door-handles, clothes and other items, even thoroughly cleaned hands can quickly become contaminated again by simple contact with any of these items. Pet stores and the people who work there should also be regarded sources of contamination. Thorough cleaning of exotic pet-related germs from the home may be practically impossible.

- *Children should be supervised so that they do not put their mouths close to or kiss exotic animals.*
- *Do not eat, drink or smoke whilst handling an exotic animal.*
- *Always wash your hands thoroughly after touching or handling any exotic animal, their cage or any other equipment.*
- *Dispose of waste water and droppings from exotic pets down the toilet – and not in the sink or bathtub.*
- *Always wash your hands immediately and thoroughly after feeding your exotic pet and after handling raw (including frozen or defrosted) mice, rats and chicks.*
- *Ensure that all surfaces that come into contact with exotic pet animals, (including areas that you may have touched), and raw or defrosting exotic animal food are cleaned thoroughly afterwards.*
- *Do not use kitchen sinks to bathe exotic pets or to wash their cage or equipment. If you use a bathroom sink or bathtub, it must be cleaned thoroughly with disinfectant afterwards.*
- *It is strongly advised that anyone handling an exotic animal or an object that may have been in contact with an exotic animal should wash their hands immediately and thoroughly afterwards. First use antibacterial soap and water, taking care to rub hands vigorously together, being careful to clean all areas. Second, apply an alcohol-based cleaning agent.*
- *If you touch any exotic animal, avoid further touching your hair, clothes (including pockets), doors and other items (including car doors, steering wheels and gear change levers) until you have thoroughly cleansed your hands.*
- *Thoroughly cleaning hands is particularly important before touching or feeding a baby or young child. Not to do so would pose a strong health risk to the infant.*
- *Local authorities, doctors, vets facility managers should advise their patients and customers of the health risks associated with having an exotic animal as a family pet and should provide appropriate health protection advice.*