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## ***FDA Statement***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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Contact: Sheryl  
McConnell 713-802-7534  
Consumer Inquiries:  
888-INFO-FDA

### **Pet Turtles Pose Risk of Salmonella Infection for Infants and Small Children**

The Houston Office of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is urging consumers not to purchase live, baby turtles, with a carapace (shell) of less than 4 inches, as pets. The FDA has been alerted to a resurgence in sales of live, baby turtles in Houston area malls.

FDA prohibited the distribution and sale of baby turtles with shells 4 inches in length or less in 1970 after a quarter million infants and small children were diagnosed with having turtle-associated salmonellosis. The agency believed that turtles with shells larger than 4 inches do not pose the same threat since youngsters would not likely try to fit them into their mouths.

Salmonella is the genus name of a number of bacteria commonly associated with food poisoning from contaminated or undercooked foods, and salmonellosis is the disease the bacteria can cause. Salmonella can be found on the outer skin and shell surfaces of the turtles causing salmonellosis for those handling turtles without properly washing their hands after handling the animals.

In food-related cases, most people suffer from gastroenteritis, often experiencing vomiting, fever, diarrhea, and cramps. For high-risk individuals, such as those with weakened immune systems, those taking antibiotics, pregnant women, the elderly, and children under 5, salmonellosis may be even more devastating, leading to blood infections, meningitis, abortion, and death.

The FDA-imposed ban allows for some exceptions. Turtles still can be exported to other countries and sold to experts for bona fide scientific, educational and exhibition purposes. Selling turtles to pet stores is not considered a bona fide purpose. More information about this regulation can be found in [Title 21, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1240.62](#).

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