

CDC Warns That Water Frogs Can Make Your Child Sick



African dwarf frog

Virginia Ortiz had no idea that the two African dwarf frogs in her great aunt's aquarium could carry *Salmonella* bacteria, a germ that can cause serious illness in people. If she had, she would not have stored her 4-month-old baby's bottles next to the kitchen sink where the water frogs' aquarium was cleaned. Virginia knew something was seriously wrong when her usually lively baby, Willie, could not hold his head up and was "pooping red stuff." She rushed Willie to the hospital, a decision she would later find out probably saved his life.

As Willie's sister, Taleah, celebrated her fourth birthday at his hospital bedside, he was pricked, prodded and x-rayed. After a week-long hospitalization, Willie's family learned he had a *Salmonella* infection. Even though Willie never touched the water frogs, he became a victim in an ongoing, nationwide outbreak of *Salmonella* Typhimurium infections linked to African dwarf frogs, resulting in hundreds of illnesses. Most are in children under 5 years old, just like Willie. African dwarf frogs, which are small and live in the water (usually in an aquarium or fish tank) appear to be harmless, but can be very dangerous for young children.



Derek plays with balloons days before becoming ill.

Four year old Derek's story is similar to Willie's. When he was rushed to the emergency room with severe cramping and diarrhea, his parents thought he had appendicitis. The doctor ruled it out and Derek returned home. Over the next two days, Derek's diarrhea became so severe that he needed to use the bathroom "more than 16 times a day", according to his mother, Lana. When he awoke in the middle of the night shaking, his parents took him back to the emergency room.

This time Derek was hospitalized for two days. One week later his parents were also told that he was infected with *Salmonella* bacteria. The doctor asked if Derek had been around any animals before he became sick. That's when Lana suddenly remembered the two water frogs her husband had recently brought home from a city fair. Lana now calls their former pets "the \$4,000 frogs" because of Derek's medical bills.

Both mothers are grateful that their boys have recovered after such severe illnesses, but they wish they had known that water frogs could carry *Salmonella* bacteria. "I knew you could get *Salmonella* from raw chicken and eggs, but not water frogs," Lana said. The mothers hope that by sharing their stories other parents can prevent their children from getting sick from water frogs.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that parents should consider this information before purchasing water frogs.

- Water frogs are not an appropriate pet for children under 5 years old, and if possible, should not be in homes or child care facilities with children of this young age.
- Keep aquariums or tanks with water frogs out a child's bedroom, especially children under 5 years old. Handle all surfaces that have come in contact with water frogs as if they are contaminated with *Salmonella* bacteria, because there is a good possibility that they are.
- If you have a water frog, watch for symptoms of *Salmonella* infection, such as diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps. Call your health care provider if you or a family member develops these symptoms.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water right after handling anything, including water, that comes in contact with water frogs or from inside their aquarium or tank.
- Kitchen sinks should not be used to empty or wash the frogs' aquarium or tank. If possible, empty and wash it outside of the home.
- Be aware that *Salmonella* infections can be caused not only by water frogs, but also by other amphibians and reptiles, such as turtles.

More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/>.