Snuggling hedgehogs isn’t worth the salmonella says the CDC

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would *very much appreciate* if you could curb your hedgehog enthusiasm. At least 17 people have gotten sick and two people have been hospitalized with *Salmonella* after getting a little too close to their spiny, fuzzy friends.

“Don’t kiss or snuggle hedgehogs, because this can spread *Salmonella* germs to your face and mouth and make you sick,” reads the CDC’s latest investigation notice. The outbreak started in October of last year, and the health agency has been trying to get its anti-snuggling message across ever since. But some people just can’t keep their faces away from the prickly mammals.

Don’t kiss or snuggle hedgehogs
Since the CDC’s warning last made headlines in January, six more people have been infected. This particular strain of *Salmonella* have been detected in 11 states from Washington to Maine, and 87 percent of the people interviewed by the CDC had *direct contact* with a hedgehog. *Salmonella* can cause diarrhea, fever, and just general abdominal misery.

Salmonella bacteria spreads often spreads through animal poop – in this case, hedgehog droppings. “These germs can easily spread to their bodies, habitats, toys, bedding, and anything in the area where they live,” reads the CDC notice, “People become sick after they touch hedgehogs or anything in their habitats.”

The CDC says that kids under 5 are most likely to get the disease, while elderly people and people with compromised immune systems are likely to endure the most severe symptoms. That lines up almost perfectly with the demographics of this particular outbreak of hedgehog plague, where the victims range in age from two to 95, with a median age of 13.

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Stymied hedgehog snugglers might find support from other pet owners whom the CDC has similarly warned against pet displays of affection. Back in 2017, puppy poop was linked to dozens of cases of diarrhea, leaving the CDC to advise pet owners to not "let pets lick around your mouth and face." Yes, that means no puppy kisses.

"Tiny turtles" caused 473 *Salmonella* infections between 2011 and 2013, leading the CDC to plead with turtle owners: "Don't kiss or snuggle with your turtle." They also created an impossibly adorable PSA to drive the point home.

[embedded content]

Feathered friends don't get a pass from the CDC either. Poultry can also carry salmonella, causing 5,128 illnesses in 76 outbreaks since 2000. For folks with chicken coops in the backyard, the agency recites a *very* familiar refrain; "don't kiss backyard poultry, or snuggle them and then touch your face or mouth."

In fact, the agency advises skipping snuggling with small pets in general. That's not to say you can't play with your tiny pets — just for the sake of your friendly neighborhood epidemiologist, please wash your hands afterwards.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/29/18287543/hedgehogs-salmonella-outbreak-cdc-snuggling