

Removing Reptiles from Child Care and Early Childhood Education Programs

Having animals can be a great learning experience, but there are always risks.



It's About Health and Safety!

- Early childhood educators are key role models for promoting healthy behaviors.
- Inform teachers, parents, and children that you are looking out for their best interest—their health.

Reptiles are Not Appropriate Pets

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that **children 5 years old and younger** have **no contact** with reptiles (including turtles, lizards, and snakes) or amphibians (such as aquatic frogs).
- *Salmonella* bacteria, naturally found in reptiles, can stay on surfaces (like clothes, toys, and countertops) for weeks. **Any contact** with a reptile, **even on clothes**, can lead to serious health risks.
- Infants, young children, pregnant women, and adults with chronic illnesses are at greater risk.
- Having a reptile in your program gives parents the false sense that reptiles are safe pets for young children, and they may want to buy one.



Engage Children with Nature

- Create animal-themed artwork.
- Read and discuss nature stories.
- Grow plants in the classroom or plant a garden.
- Plan a day trip to look at animals instead of having reptiles come to the classroom.

Take Action!

- Step 1:** Gather and share health risk information about reptiles and children five years of age and younger.
- Step 2:** Schedule meetings with administrators, teachers, and parents to discuss the issue. Celebrate your role as protectors of human and animal health.
- Step 3:** Develop and implement a policy addressing reptiles in the classroom.
- Step 4:** Find an appropriate home for the reptile (see below), or bring the reptile to your Animal Control Agency. For a list of Los Angeles County locations, visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/AnimalControlList.htm



Good Homes for Reptiles are Homes With:

- No children under the age of five years
- No pregnant women
- Persons without a weakened immune system
- Persons without any chronic illnesses



Returning a Pet Reptile “to the Wild” is NOT a Good Idea

- Red-eared slider turtles, for example, have no known “enemies” in nature. This allows them to multiply quickly in parks, ponds, streams, and rivers.
- These turtles are known to cause serious environmental harm. They replace native turtles and other local wildlife, in waterways around the world.

Thank you for all you do to protect children’s health!



Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
Acute Communicable Disease Control, Veterinary Public Health
For further information, visit
<http://lapublichealth.org/acd/> or <http://lapublichealth.org/vet/>

