

Be careful of close contact of children, at home, with non-traditional pets (NTP)¹

**Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine
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Apart from dogs or cats, “non-traditional pets” (NTP), domestic (rabbit, goat, pig, etc.) or non-domestic animals [rodents (rats, mice, etc.), hedgehogs, reptiles, amphibians, birds...] may be kept at home. To hold them is subject to declaration or possession of a certificate of capacity, or is even prohibited (1), due to the risks incurred by the most vulnerable people, including children under 5, an age at which recommending hand washing is not always effective.

The trauma (bite, scratch, constriction, etc.) that may occur is generally sporadic and left ignored by the victim. Biting is the most common means of inoculation of a pathogen present naturally in the animal's saliva and which can cause fatal septicemia.

Since the animal is most often asymptomatic, any close contact also presents a risk of transmission of an infectious agent, particularly when this animal sleeps with the child in the bedroom (2).

With NTP, the risk of zoonotic disease is significant and varies depending on the animal kept: salmonellosis (wild rats or mice, birds (particularly through consumption of contaminated eggs from pet chickens), lizards, frogs (after a film for children encouraging them to kiss these animals), small aquatic turtles (3) (hence their ban on sale in the United States in 1975), reptiles (especially in young children) (4); salmonellosis resistant to fluoroquinolones, linked to the use of these antibiotics in reptiles (5); lymphocytic choriomeningitis (wild mice (6), psittacosis (birds); enterohemorrhagic colibacillosis (ruminants); (7) or rat reservoirs of the “cow pox” virus (8)]; leptospirosis (rats, mice, etc.) (9); hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome due to Seoul hantavirus (rat) (10).

In the United States, these risks were identified from 1996 to 2017 and mainly concern children under 5 (11). They can be lethal, and the disease the most frequently transmitted by NTP is salmonellosis (81% of cases). In Europe, underestimation of these risks is linked to several factors: 1) non-reporting of isolated cases; 2) absence of an alert system capable, as in the United States, of collecting sporadic cases; 3) ignorance of some zoonoses, whether emerging or linked to some NTP species.

¹Press release from the Academy's Rapid Communication Platform.

Given the underestimation of these risks, the National Academy of Medicine recommends to (12):

- inform the public about the risks linked to the presence at home of some NTP whose detention is authorized;
- advise against, when children under 5 are present at home, ownership of NTPs that can bite (ferret, rat, iguana), or transmit infectious agents (rodents, snakes, turtles, amphibians, birds, small ruminants, etc.);
- remind parents of the importance, in the event of any illness in a child under 5, of notifying their doctor if an NTP is present at home;
- strengthen health controls in animal stores housing marketed NTPs, depending on the zoonotic risks specific to each species;
- create an epidemiological surveillance platform for zoonoses observed in children in contact with an NTP, mobilizing all the stakeholders concerned (medical and veterinary laboratories, etc.), and allowing data sharing for detection, early treatment and prevention of these diseases.

Références

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