State of North Carolina
Department of Environment,
Health and Natural Resources
Division of Environmental Health

James B. Hunt, Jr., Governor
Jonathan B. Howes, Secretary
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MEMORANDUM

To: Local Environmental Health Directors, Supervisors and Coordinators

From: Susan C. Grayson, Branch Head
Food, Lodging & Institutional Sanitation Branch

Ed Norman, Branch Head
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch

Subject: Reptile Pets in Day Cares and Schools

In the wake of the recent newspaper stories regarding the death of an infant from Salmonellosis caught from the family's iguana, we are anticipating that you may receive calls from schools and/or day cares regarding reptile pets. While reptiles are a small contributor to the total number of cases of Salmonellosis in any given year, their epidemiologic link has been proven and attention should be paid to their presence. The following information has been gleaned from ProMed (an emerging diseases e-mail forum) and from website address:
http://www.xmission.com/~gastown/herpmed/salm.htm

All reptiles should be considered carriers of Salmonella. Studies have shown up to 90% of reptiles carrying various Salmonella species. Excretion of Salmonella is likely to be sporadic. Therefore, culturing a reptile is pointless unless you are trying to prove a link with a human case. Transovarian transmission (from mother to egg), occurs in reptiles. They may also acquire it from contact with other reptiles or from feeding on excrement, a common trait of hatchlings.

Salmonella is a normal inhabitant in the gut of reptiles and is essential in herbivores such as the iguana, which employ hindgut fermentation. Treating the reptile with antibiotics can be harmful to the animal and could result in the formation of an antibiotic-resistant strain of bacteria.

Various authorities have recommended that reptiles should not be considered as pets for the following persons:

- ☐ pre-school children,
- ☐ pregnant women,
- ☐ persons with HIV or AIDS or other immunodeficiencies,
- ☐ persons taking anti-rejection drugs for transplants,
- ☐ persons taking any drug that depresses or alters immune function (steroids, chemotherapy for cancer, biological response modifiers, or others),
- ☐ persons receiving radiation treatment, and
- ☐ elderly persons who have poor nutritional status.