

# 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](http://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/>

