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George Balazs
National Marine Fisheries Service
2570 Dole Street
Honolulu, Hawaii, 96822-2396

Dear George:

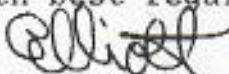
I would like to follow up on our phone conversation yesterday by sharing with you my experiences and knowledge about communicable disease between reptiles and humans. After working with reptiles as a clinician and researcher since graduating from veterinary college in 1975, including 14 years of experience with sea turtles, I have found that there are relatively few diseases that humans can acquire from reptiles. With regard to transmission to humans, the only disease of public health significance is salmonellosis. Many reptiles carry various species of Salmonella in their gastrointestinal tract as part of their normal bacterial fauna. Pet turtles in the U.S. have been incriminated as sources of human Salmonella infections. This is not that different from chickens and chicken products which are also considered a source of Salmonella in humans. Beyond Salmonella, and a few parasites which may go from reptiles to humans, reptiles do not appear to harbor many pathogens that can cause disease in humans. Many of the pathogens in reptiles, especially viruses, are adapted to growing at low body temperatures and do not grow as well at temperatures above 35 C.

With regard to green turtle fibropapilloma, as you know, although the causative agent has not been determined, a virus is the number one suspect. If so, I doubt that it would be able to invade and multiply in humans. If this was the case, most of us working with this disease would have been infected long ago.

People working with stranded sea turtles should have little to fear in the way of communicable diseases if normal precautions are taken. Wearing gloves is recommended and as long as people are careful while handling the carcasses and clean up thoroughly when done, risks of catching a disease should be minimal. In all the years that I have had contact with the stranding network in Florida, I have yet to hear of anyone developing a disease from working with a sea turtle carcass.

If anything further is needed, feel free to give me a call.

With best regards,



Elliott Jacobson
Professor