

Frog Red Leg and Worm Parasite Treatment

Proper steps in diagnosing and getting rid of worms and red leg in frogs.

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have a 7- or 8-year-old White's treefrog that I believe has tapeworms. I just lost my younger White's two weeks ago to what I now believe was the same problem, only it happened too fast for me to take action. My older guy is very plump, and has fought red leg since I first got him.

After the death of my younger frog, I examined the older one, and I pulled what I thought to be mucousy skin off of his leg and belly. A few medium-sized ulcers turned up. Like I mentioned, he has suffered on and off from red leg, and I assumed the bacteria had resurfaced. I treated him and the water with tetracycline hydrochloride.

This morning when I went to clean out his aquarium, I noticed the ulcers and lesions had gotten slightly worse, and that there was a milky slime covering them. I pulled on it to see if it was just skin or pus, and it came out in strands. I placed the strands in water and they began to move and twist around. I have seen tapeworms many times in cats, dogs and horses, and these were almost identical. I proceeded to look online for the treatment and related symptoms, and then found this site. If there is anything I can do to help my little buddy, please email me back!

While I admire you for your attempts to diagnose and treat your frog on your own, I really think that you should enlist the help of a qualified herp vet at this point, in order to provide the best and most sophisticated care necessary for your frog.

The worms that you pulled from the wounds might be tapeworms, although it is much more likely that they are a type of filarid worm. In order to treat the infestation properly, and safely, it is necessary that the parasites be definitively identified. The correct treatment for tapes is completely different than the one necessary to eradicate filarid worms, for example. So you can see why it is so important to find a vet who has training in parasitology and can either identify the worms or can send them to a parasitologist for proper identification. Once that is done, then the correct medication, at the proper dose (based on your frog's accurate weight in grams) can be administered. This is not something that you should attempt on your own.

Also, while it is admirable that you have been battling red leg in your frog on your own, you really should seek out a knowledgeable herp vet to help you fight this infection. For example, a German preparation of doxycycline, not available in this country, has proved to be a wonderful treatment for red leg, in my experience. Some vets are able to import this wonder drug for use in pet animals, and when given by injection, it can be a very useful medication in turtles, tortoises, lizards, snakes and frogs. It works well against the common bacteria that are responsible for causing red leg, as well as being an appropriate treatment against mycoplasmosis, which is found in some tortoises. Doxy also comes in a water-soluble powder that can be used as a soak for herps, and is a much more effective antibiotic than tetracycline.

Sometimes, with red leg, I will also recommend topical preparations in addition to the systemic medications. Also, with red leg, it is imperative that the habitat, water quality, husbandry, temperature (water and air), diet and methods of disinfecting the habitat all be examined and corrected, if necessary, in order to prevent the reoccurrence of red leg.

As an aside, in the future, it is always best if you can have a necropsy (animal autopsy) performed on any pet that dies, especially in a multiple pet household. While a necropsy on your frog that died might not have provided all the answers about why it died, it might have provided your vet, and you, the information necessary to treat your remaining frog. Plus, this information could have saved you time so that your remaining frog could begin appropriate therapy sooner. In the future, consider investing in your animals by having necropsies performed on any critters that die, for the sake of the survivors.

So please locate a qualified herp vet who can help you with your frog. And please don't use the excuse that you can't find a vet who can help you. I have suggested time and time again that it is possible to find a vet who may not have the depth of experience, but is able to utilize the service offered by most large diagnostic veterinary labs, which provide veterinary consultants who can offer help on any cases, at no charge to their clients. This service can provide invaluable support when a vet is not familiar with a specific species or their diseases. Please encourage your vet to call for help with your frog. There is no reason for you to feel that you need to treat your frog all on your own, or with just the help of information that you find on the Internet. Good luck with your frog!

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Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) web site at www.arav.com. Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.