

Herp or Lizard with Cryptosporidium

What's the best medicine for a lizard with Cryptosporidium.

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have a pair of bearded dragons, and both had parasites a while ago and were treated with Albon. Both seemed to be clean, but after a while the female started being lethargic and losing weight. There is also blood on the stool. An acid-fast staining of a fecal sample showed low levels of Cryptosporidium, so we began treatment with I think is sulfadimethoxine or Trimethoprim-Sulfadiazine, and I daily give her a mixture of Repta-Aid, Acidophilus and sometimes ParaZap in clean reptile water.

I also mix her vegetables, fruits and supplements in a blender and feed her by hand because she does not want to eat. I try to give her two baths per week. I clean the cage as soon after she defecates as I can and clean at least twice a week. It has been two weeks now, and there is still blood in her stool, although her weight seems to be controlled. I have also noticed a difference in the color of some of her scales under her belly and cloaca so I clean her under belly with betadine twice a week. Do you think this is all caused by Cryptosporidium? I do not want her to die.

I wrote about Cryptosporidium in my last online column. So, check back and read the particulars about this one-celled protozoal organism. Sulfa antibiotics, such as Trimethoprim-Sulfa (Bactrim or Septra) and sulfadimethoxine (Albon) are listed in some older literature as potential treatments for cryptosporidiosis, however, as a treatment for crypto, the dosage necessary can be potentially toxic, and the use of sulfas for treating crypto is considered questionable.

A better and more efficacious drug is paromomycin (Humatin). But, you should be aware that it is unlikely that any medication will cure your lizard. I hope you have been treating both of your bearded dragons for crypto if they are sharing a habitat.

Make sure that you are keeping your beardie at the high end of its temperature range so that it is under the least amount of physical stress possible. Keep the cage around 90 degrees Fahrenheit with a focal hot spot of about 110 degrees. The beardie may need to be given parenteral fluids (either subcutaneously or intracoelomically), to keep it hydrated. Ask your vet about a nutritionally complete and dense mixture that you can use to syringe-feed your female bearded dragon, as I am concerned that the mixture that you are giving won't provide the best balance of nutrients.

I am unsure if the changes to the belly scales are related to the other problems. You should bring this to your vet's attention during your next recheck exam. Talk to your vet about perhaps changing the medications for your beardies to paromomycin. Also, ask your vet about arranging a consultation with an experienced herp vet through one of the large diagnostic labs that offers free consultation service if he or she feels that assistance would be helpful.

I know that I keep harping on the consultation service offered by the veterinary diagnostic labs, but it is an excellent way for interested vets who are just lacking practical experience, to be able to discuss cases with experienced herp veterinarians. This is offered as a free service, and I highly recommend that a vet with questions on difficult cases, or just if a vet even wants to bounce questions off of a colleague, that they make full use of this service. It can be invaluable to both novice and experienced vets.

Good luck with your beardies.

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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.