

Lizard With Lump or Abscess Over Eye

My reptile isn't eating and has a bump over his eye. What should I do?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I am a "retired" vet tech with a 1-year-old veiled chameleon. Over the past week, he has grown a small, molelike lump above his left eye that involves some swelling in that eye as well. He seems to be unable to catch his crickets and seems a little off balance.

I took him to my vet, who also treats my many other reptiles. He opened the lump hoping to find the "white cheesy" stuff that is sometimes/usually present in reptile infections. We did not see that, so he scraped out some of what was in there, and I am having a culture/sensitivity sent into the lab. However, I won't have results for several days.

My dilemma is that I need to keep Zeus eating, and he isn't cooperating with my efforts. Because he doesn't want me handling him, I try to place the cricket in his mouth while he is hissing and holding his mouth open in hopes of giving me a quick bite!

Are there any other food items that I can try? How about some mushy kind of foods? I feed my bearded dragon Bearded Dragon Bites along with his usual foods and was wondering if this was something I could give Zeus as a food source to keep him going at least until I can figure out what the lump is.

I am also giving Baytril injections every 24 hours until the test results come back. So I have taken the first steps but need any suggestions to get him to eat. Any help would be appreciated. The picture shows the lump I am concerned about.

I have several concerns that I want to address first. If you read the label for Baytril, enrofloxacin, it says to give ONE injection and then switch to giving it orally. I have seen cases of herps developing severe muscle damage and necrosis from repeated injections. It is not safe, nor wise, to do repeated enrofloxacin injections. The injectable can be given orally, or your vet may have access to Bayer's poultry solution, 3.23 percent, that is water-soluble. Some pigeon supply companies also offer out of country 5 and 10 percent water-soluble enrofloxacin. From studies performed, it appears that giving the antibiotic orally causes adequate levels in the bloodstream of herps.

Studies have shown that the most effective antibiotic for many herp abscesses is Fortaz, dosed at 20 mg/kg SQ, every 72 hours, although when possible, choice of antibiotics should be made based on culture and sensitivity results, method of administration, any pharmacokinetic studies performed and cost.

For all antibiotics, the reptile should be kept at the higher end of the POTZ (preferred optimum temperature zone), in order that the drugs work most effectively. So, for all herps being placed on antibiotics, one must know the temperature zone for each species and then make a point of maintaining it at the high end of the range during treatment.

In addition to having a bacterial culture and sensitivity on the mass, cytology might also prove helpful. The material from the lump can be smeared onto a glass slide or the slide can be touched to the opened mass, and then the slide is stained and examined with a microscope. A complete blood count (CBC) and plasma chemistry panel might also provide clues to what is going on with Zeus.

I am also concerned about Zeus being unstable and off-balance. I wonder if your chameleon could have a middle ear infection that could be affecting its balance. Zeus should have the openings of the Eustachian tubes evaluated to make sure that they are draining the middle ear properly.

Chameleons sometimes get pockets under the skin with a subcutaneous worm living there. But it doesn't sound as if that is what came out of the mass on his head. That is worth checking into, however.

Now, onto your questions. First, I would recommend injecting a cricket or mealworm with the appropriate dose of antibiotic, and then encouraging Zeus to eat the "spiked" insect. This is the easiest way to administer medications to a reptile that is still eating voluntarily without the need for handling it, causing undue stress.

The volume of food that should be fed to a herp is approximately 20 ml/kg body weight every 24 to 48 hours. This amount can be used as a guideline. For a primarily carnivorous chameleon (although veileds do consume some vegetable material, as well), you can make up a mixture of canned A/D diet mixed with sports drink, or a mixture of one jar all-meat baby food mixed with one fourth of a jar of one vegetable baby food, and administered by syringe. These should be fine to

feed short-term until you get Zeus eating on its own again. If Zeus is dehydrated, then you can add more water, sports drink or pediatric oral rehydration fluid to the food. Be careful not to aspirate Zeus. If you are not sure how to administer the nutrients using a syringe, then ask your vet to show you how to do it first. I wouldn't recommend trying to pass a stomach tube in a chameleon due to the trauma and stress involved.

Any handling of a chameleon is stressful to them, so make sure to keep handling to an absolute minimum. Try to coordinate medicating and force feeding so that it is only handled once a day at the most.

I hope this helps.

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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.