

## Lizard Mouth Sores

**My fat-tailed gecko lizard has had sores around his mouth, and they have been creeping up toward his nose for several months now. What is wrong?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

I am a 9-year-old girl who someday wants to be a vet. For now, I really need your help. My dear fat-tailed gecko has had sores around his mouth, and they have been creeping up toward his nose for several months now. Nothing else about him seems to be wrong. His appetite is good, he sheds often, and is active and alert. Despite my treating his sores, they are not getting any better. I am so concerned. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks for writing. It is wonderful that you aspire to become a veterinarian someday, but at this point I think that you should actually employ the services of a herp veterinarian to help you with your gecko.

While you didn't tell me what treatments that you are utilizing with your gecko, I suspect that because the sores have not disappeared and actually appear to have spread, it would seem that it is time to consult a professional. A herp vet can perform diagnostic tests in an attempt to pinpoint the cause of the sores, and then prescribe appropriate therapy to treat the disease itself. Your vet may want to perform skin scrapings, bacterial and/or fungal cultures, Gram's stains of the lesions or even a biopsy (surgical removal of a piece of the lesion to be examined under the microscope after being stained with special tissue stains) of a sore in order to correctly diagnose why this is happening to your lizard. In some cases, blood tests, such as a complete blood count, may be performed. Of course, all of this costs money, and your vet will try to only run necessary tests, but without testing of some kind, it will be impossible to determine what is causing the sores.

It could be something as simple as you offering too many crickets at a time, resulting in the hungry crickets biting your lizard repeatedly in the area of the lesions, causing a chronic skin condition. The sores could possibly be caused by an aggressive bacterial infection, a type of parasite or even some kind of tumor in the skin. All of these require different treatments, so you can see why it is important to have some diagnostic tests performed in order to correctly diagnose the problem.

Ask your parents if they will set up an appointment with a herp vet in your area. When you go in to see the vet, be as prepared as you can. Your vet will want to know exactly what you have treated your lizard with, the precise dose administered, how many times per day and for how long you have been treating your gecko. Your vet will also want to know the temperature range that your lizard is kept within, the type of substrate in the habitat, the type of lighting in the habitat, how many hours of light and dark he gets daily, the humidity range in the habitat, the exact diet that he consumes (how many of each type of insect does it eat at a time?) and how you gut-load or dust your insects with supplements. Your vet will also need to know how often you clean out your gecko's habitat and what cleaning agents you use to clean it with. Even if your cleaning or feeding habits aren't optimal, be sure to be truthful in your answers for your vet to best be able to help you and your gecko. If you don't know the answers to some of the questions that I have asked, it is time to find out by purchasing thermometers and hygrometers (for humidity), because this is important information for any herper to record routinely and to pay attention to in order to properly care for their charges.

Please find a herp vet and talk to your parents about getting the veterinary care necessary for your gecko. By taking your gecko in to see a qualified herp vet, you will be doing your gecko a great favor, and you will most likely learn a lot about veterinary medicine in the process. Your vet will also be able to show you how to properly treat the gecko once it is correctly diagnosed.

If your vet has the time, while you are there, let him or her know that you have an interest in a career in veterinary medicine, and ask if you can be allowed to view some of the tests (such as Gram's stains, fecal parasite exams and skin scrapings that are usually run right in the vet's office). Many veterinary hospitals are very busy places, but if you notify your vet ahead of time and ask, you might be allowed to be more involved in the goings-on of your case. That could be a win-win situation for all involved. Good luck with your gecko. Your gecko is lucky to have such a caring owner!

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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](http://www.arav.com). Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.