

Lizard Mouth Abscess and Swelling With Fluid

There is a lot of fluid around my lizard's neck and lower jaw. What could this be? I have looked at pictures of mouth rot and this looks nothing like that at all.

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I have a Texas collared. Shortly after getting him, we noticed a growth on his lower jaw. At first it looked like it could be some sort of worm, and we pulled it out. The growth went away for about a week and then came back twice the size. Now there seems to be a lot of fluid around his neck and lower jaw. What could this be? I have looked at pictures of mouth rot and this looks nothing like that at all. He is now also becoming very weak and not eating much, as all the fluid is stopping him from eating. Any advice would be helpful as to what this could be.

I am very concerned about your Texas collared lizard, and I suggest that you make an appointment immediately with a herp veterinarian to have your lizard examined and treated. If you don't have a vet for your reptile, you can call local breeders or pet retailers and ask who they recommend as a herp vet in your area or you can call a couple of local dog and cat vets who do not treat herps, and ask who they recommend in your area for herp medicine.

Even if there aren't any vets experienced in dealing with herp problems, you can suggest that they call the diagnostic lab that they utilize and request a consult with one of their on-staff veterinarians. Diagnostic labs offer this consultation service free-of-charge to veterinarians, so this means that no vet needs to feel all alone out there when dealing with unfamiliar species or diseases. This service can prove invaluable to vets who just don't see a large caseload of exotics. They can utilize the experience and expertise of veterinary consultants for help with individual cases.

I am not sure exactly what the lesion is that your collared lizard is suffering from. It could be an abscess, caused by bacteria, or it could be a fungal granuloma or even a lesion caused by invading parasites. It is not likely to be a tumor, but rarely, this can occur.

Whatever this is, it is obviously very serious, as fluid is building up around the neck and lower jaw, and the lizard is weak and not eating well. Please don't wait another day. Find a veterinary professional who can help you with your lizard and who can provide you with appropriate medications once lab tests have been run to attempt to ascertain what this lesion is. In the meantime, you can soak the lizard in warm, clear sport's drink (the colored ones tend to dye lizard skin colors not normally found in nature!) Make sure that it is shallow enough so that your weak lizard cannot drown. You can soak your lizard for 10 minutes up to four times per day, to allow it to drink the sugar and electrolyte solution, to provide it with nutrients and hydration until you can get it in to see the veterinarian. Keep the lizard warm in between the soaks.

Good luck with your collared lizard. When you take it in to see the vet, make sure you bring in the information about its minimum and maximum temperature ranges in its habitat, humidity information, dietary information and also bring any supplements that you are giving it. If possible, bring in a fresh stool sample (although if it hasn't been eating well, chances are it won't have much in the way of fecal material).

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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.