

Reptile Mite Treatments

How do you remove mites from reptiles and clean their vivarium after an infestation?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

I was wondering how to get rid of mites. I have just had an outbreak and the tank is made mostly of wood, so I don't know if I can disinfect it or not. How do I get the mites off the rocks and the reptiles themselves?

You didn't say if the mite problem was in lizards or snakes. Regardless, I will give you some suggestions, but I recommend that you find a good herp vet who can work with you and help you with this problem.

Mites, while very small, can cause big problems. They can transmit blood parasites and bacteria, and even viruses, between reptiles. They also drain serum, the liquid portion of the blood. They cause intense discomfort to their victim, and often weaken the herp, resulting in secondary infections, poor health and, perhaps, even death in severe infestations. For these reasons, they should be eliminated whenever possible.

Infested snakes often spend much more time soaking in their water bowl and often experience dysecdysis (difficulty shedding). Mites are often most visible around the eyes, around the cloaca, and if the herp is soaking often, mites can be seen floating in the water source.

There are many over-the-counter mite sprays available. However, I always recommend that you seek the help of a herp veterinarian who can offer specific recommendations for your particular situation. Since the mites lay their eggs off of the host, in the environment, both must be treated, as you know, since you have asked about cleaning the wooden enclosure.

Mites can spread rapidly throughout a collection and can even invade an entire building. It's probably best to treat the entire collection. Treatment is not an easy task! Since mites favor cracks and seams, the entire cage must be thoroughly cleaned with warm soapy water, and then rinsed. All waste material must be removed. All cage equipment must be thoroughly cleaned and soaked. Unfortunately, mites can lay eggs deep within the cracks in wood, so it is recommended that wooden objects be discarded and replaced.

A wooden cage is problematic for cleaning. I think you should contact a herp vet who can tell you if there is some way to salvage this particular cage or whether or not it should be replaced. He or she can also help you with particular treatment protocols for your pet herps. Good luck!

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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.