

## Ivermectin Treatment for Snake With Mites

### **Can the liquid Ivermectin be used to rid my snake of mites?**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP*

Can the liquid ivermectin, available at a feed store for farm animals, be used on snakes for treating snake mites? I was given the dosage by a reliable source and would like to administer it myself.

If you're having a problem with mites, I think in the long run, you'll probably save yourself money and headaches by consulting with a herp vet before you embark on your mite treatment plan. So I wouldn't recommend doing it yourself.

Ivermectin is considered a safe and effective drug for removing ticks and mites, when dosed correctly. Oral dosing does not appear to be a very effective way to administer this medication for treating mites. To administer it correctly, each snake must be precisely weighed and the medication should be administered by subcutaneous injection once a week for three treatments. For smaller snakes, often the ivermectin must be diluted in order to be precisely dosed. Other treatments have been successful using ivermectin diluted in water and administered as a spray.

Ivermectin, however, has been known to cause neurological signs in some species, and it can cross the blood-brain barrier in chelonians and skinks, which can be very dangerous, even fatal. It also should not be used on indigo snakes because of the risk of serious side effects.

If one or more of your snakes developed neurological signs as an idiosyncratic reaction to this medication, are you prepared to administer whatever type of first aid and follow-up medical care required? Do you know how to provide the equivalent of herp CPR? Do you have oxygen available, if necessary, should your snake stop breathing? Do you have an accurate scale to weigh each snake precisely? Do you know how to dilute a medication? Do you know how to calculate dosages? All of these should be taken into consideration prior to administering a new medication to your snakes. While the chance of a life-threatening reaction occurring is quite low, it can happen. This is why it is always a good idea to have a vet involved with any new therapy.

I recommend that antiparasitic medications such as ivermectin be administered by a qualified herp vet, at least for the first time, and then monitor the patients for at least a half hour after dosing, in case there is an immediate reaction. Sometimes, I will then send home the rest of the doses to save the owner from additional time and expense, once precise dosing has been calculated, based on the snake's body weight in grams (using a good quality gram scale and not an inexpensive food scale, for example). The owner must be able to safely administer injections, after being shown by my staff how to correctly do it, and where to inject, as well.

When dealing with snake mites, it is not just a matter of treating the snakes as the environment must also be cleaned and appropriately treated. Mites may be found in hide boxes and other cage equipment, which needs to be addressed. Often, I will recommend a pyrethroid for the environment and perhaps a larval inhibitor, as well. It is important to choose the correct environmental medications or it can become impossible to safely eradicate the mites. The advice of a herp vet can be invaluable in this regard, as well. Mites also can transmit certain diseases, and by having your vet examine your collection, his or her trained eye may discern subtle clinical signs of disease that you might have missed.

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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.