

Snake With Pseudomonas

Pseudomonas is an opportunistic bacterium in snakes.

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

Q. We keep a number of pythons. One python snake, Frank (3 years old, 6 feet long, 16½ pounds), is an amelanistic Burmese python that was diagnosed with Pseudomonas. We gave the snake Baytril injections for one week, but to no avail. Then, we put him on Claforan (cefotaxime) injections (1.5cc every day for three weeks). The python snake seems to be feeling much better, but still won't eat.

Worse, I fear that our other Burmese python (Kali, 6 to 9 years old, 10 feet long, 70 pounds) is now refusing food. We feed all of our snakes frozen feeders only, except the ball pythons when they are feeling picky. I need to retest Kali's fecal sample, but is there anything I can do to spike a feeding response in this snake? I would hate to have to force feed, as I learned it can be traumatic to the snake. Will the snakes not eat at all if there are any "bad" bacteria still in the body? Any help would be greatly appreciated.

A. I am very concerned about your snakes. You see, Pseudomonas is considered an opportunistic bacterium in snakes, meaning that it usually only causes disease if the snake's immune system is compromised due to stress, too cool of living conditions, malnutrition (not likely in snakes that eat whole prey items) or a viral infection, for example. You didn't say where the infection was located. Did the snake show signs of respiratory infection? Unfortunately, enrofloxacin (Baytril) given for only one week for a herp probably isn't long enough to effectively combat many bacterial infections. During antibiotic treatment, the herp must be maintained at the high end of its temperature gradient for antibiotics to work most effectively.

If the bacterium was just cultured from the snake's stool, with no blood work to support a bacterial infection in the snake, I wouldn't just assume that is the problem. I still feel that there must be an underlying problem if your snake truly has a Pseudomonas infection. Perhaps there is an underlying paramyxovirus infection. It is possible to have your snake's blood tested (it often takes two titers performed a few weeks apart) to diagnose this viral infection. Ask your vet about running blood work on your snakes that are not eating, to try to ascertain what is going on.

At this point, I'm not as concerned about getting your snakes eating, as I am about first finding out why they are not eating, and that will involve diagnostics. Also, your vet should go over your snake husbandry with you, making sure that you are keeping your snakes at the right temperature ranges and that you are cleaning and disinfecting your habitats frequently and thoroughly. If your vet needs some assistance, he or she can call for a consultation with a vet at the lab that they use, to speak with a herp vet who can advise them on diagnostics, treatments and husbandry, if necessary.

Please, don't just rely on a fecal culture for your diagnostics. Good luck with your snakes!

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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.