

New Bacteria Strain Causes Lizard Dermatitis

Belgium researchers have identified a new bacteria strain that causes dermatitis in desert lizards.

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Belgium researchers have identified a new bacteria strain that causes dermatitis in desert lizards. The skin condition, which can have various causes, is common in captive herps, especially lizards.

Isolating bacteria from five desert lizards suffering from dermatitis, including three spiny-tailed lizards (*Uromastyx* spp.), An Martel and other Ghent University scientists found a causal relationship between an unidentified bacterium and the skin lesions. After examining the bacterium's genetic sequence, the researchers discovered it represented a new taxon and species, and they published their findings in the September 2008 issue of the *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*. They hope that identifying the pathogen, which they named *Devriesea agamarum*, will contribute to the understanding of lizard skin disease and ultimately help to develop ways to control it.

Herp veterinarian Dr. Doug Mader said the findings could help veterinarians treat the disease. "If these bacteria can be cultured, then presumably antibiotic sensitivities can be performed, which will help veterinarians choose the best drug needed to treat the infection."

Of course, prevention is always the best solution. Dr. Kevin Wright, who co-owns the Arizona Exotic Animal Hospital, said ultimately humidity, lighting and temperature issues predispose captive desert lizards to bacterial infections. Take for example desert lizards kept in 65 percent or higher humidity — rather than 20 to 30 percent. "This moister humidity is detrimental to a desert lizard because the skin is more permeable than a tropical rain forest lizard," he said, "and the constant uptake of too much water likely impacts the physiology of the skin cells long term, making them more susceptible to bacterial (and fungal) infections."