

# Mycobacterium Infections

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What is a *Mycobacterium* infection?

*Mycobacterium* infections in reptiles are uncommon and are caused by a bacterium that is related to the one that causes tuberculosis. These bacteria can infect numerous organs and most commonly cause the development of nodules at the site of infection.

How is a *Mycobacterium* infection transmitted?

How *Mycobacterium* is transmitted between reptiles is not well understood. It most likely enters through a break in the skin or through ingestion. Animals that have poorly functioning immune systems are most at risk. These would include animals that may be stressed, have poor nutrition, or are ill with other chronic diseases. Wild caught animals would be more likely to harbor the bacteria.



What are the symptoms of a *Mycobacterium* infection in reptiles?

Nodules can develop in the liver, lungs, bone, nervous system, mouth, and underneath the skin. The symptoms will vary depending on the location of the infection. Many reptiles or amphibians with a *Mycobacterium* infection will show weight loss even though the animal has a good appetite.

How are reptiles with *Mycobacterium* infection treated?

Because treatment is very expensive, must last up to 6 months, and the risk of transmission of *Mycobacterium* to people is present, most reptiles with this infection are euthanized.

Can a *Mycobacterium* infection be transmitted from reptiles to people?

It should be considered possible for a human to acquire a *Mycobacterium* infection from a reptile. Symptoms in humans may include nodules on the skin. Persons with suppressed immune systems could develop respiratory disease, swollen lymph nodes, bone infections, and arthritis. To prevent this and other infections, people should wear gloves when cleaning cages, wash their hands well after handling their herp, and have their herp examined if it shows any signs of illness.