

Worms and Reptiles

Reptile Worms & Parasites: What You Need to Know

Worms are surprisingly common in reptiles, and knowing how to spot the signs can help ensure your scaly friend gets the treatment they need quickly if they pick up any of these unwelcome parasites.

Preventing Worms in Reptiles

Most reptiles can tolerate a low level of worms without significant health issues. Routine worming isn't usually necessary unless there's a specific concern. Instead, focus on prevention to reduce the chances of your reptile getting worms in the first



place!

Here are some key tips:

1. **Good Husbandry:** Keeping your reptile's environment clean is crucial. Regularly clean their cage, and wash your hands between handling different reptiles to prevent cross-contamination.
2. **Freezing Bedding:** If you're concerned about parasites hitching a ride on bedding, consider putting it in the freezer overnight. This can kill off many parasites.
3. **Screen New Reptiles:** If you're introducing a new reptile to your home, it's wise to screen them for parasites before letting them mix with your current pets.
4. **Annual Faecal Tests:** Getting a faecal test done once a year can help screen your reptiles for any potential parasites.

Help! My Reptile Has Worms!

If you suspect your reptile has worms, it's best to visit your local vet for a check-up. In many cases, a simple deworming program is effective for treating the problem. However, if your reptile is showing serious symptoms, like an upset tummy or a loss of appetite, they may need more supportive care.

While most reptiles don't need routine worming, if you think your pet may be at higher risk, talk to your vet about preventive treatments that could be beneficial.



Your Health Matters Too!

You're very unlikely to catch worms from your reptile, but it's always good practice to wash your hands after handling them. This simple step helps protect you against various diseases, the most common of which is salmonella.

If you have any health concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to your local veterinary practice for guidance.



Common Types of Worms in Reptiles

Here are some of the most common types of worms and parasites that can affect reptiles:

Roundworms

Roundworms, such as *Ascaris* and *Strongyloides* species, can infect reptiles, with lizards being particularly prone. Snakes may also experience infestations of hookworms like *Kalicephalus*, which can enter through the skin and cause lesions. While small numbers may go unnoticed, larger infestations can lead to serious issues, including:

- Weight loss
- Failure to thrive
- Respiratory problems
- Skin or mouth sores
- Loss of appetite

Pinworms

Pinworms are quite common in many pet reptiles, especially tortoises, bearded dragons, and leopard geckos. While low numbers of pinworm eggs in feces may be normal, high levels can cause an upset stomach, decreased appetite, and weight loss, requiring treatment.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms have a unique life cycle, needing an intermediate host—ranging from fleas to cows—before they can infect reptiles. Although this complex life cycle generally reduces the chance of infestation, reptiles can still get tapeworms. You might notice signs of a tapeworm infestation through segments in the faeces that resemble moving grains of rice. Affected reptiles may experience weight loss, but many infections are mild and can go unnoticed.

Flukes

Also known as trematodes, flukes primarily inhabit the intestines of reptiles but can migrate to other organs, such as the lungs, liver, and kidneys, especially in species like

turtles. Flukes are very uncommon in captive-bred reptiles, making them less of a concern for most pet owners.

Final Thoughts

Being proactive about your reptile's health and hygiene is key to preventing worm infestations and ensuring they stay happy and healthy. If you notice any unusual symptoms, don't hesitate to consult your vet. With proper care, your reptile can live a long and healthy life!