Ball Python Scale Rot Prevention & Inspection Checklist

A practical, print-friendly guide to checking belly scales, managing enclosure moisture, and knowing when to contact a reptile veterinarian.

How to use this checklist: Work through the sections during routine enclosure maintenance. Mark each box only after you have completed that check. All boxes are intentionally empty.

1. Belly & Skin Health Inspection

Check your ball python's ventral scales under good lighting.

- ☐ Inspect the entire belly for unusual pink or red patches.
- ☐ Look for localized reddish-brown or pale discoloration.
- ☐ Check for raised, separated, blistered, or unusually soft scales.
- ☐ Look for open sores, discharge, dark tissue, or missing scales.
- ☐ Compare suspicious areas with previous photographs.
- ☐ Check whether discoloration is localized or part of a generalized premolt color change.
- ☐ Record any changes in appearance, size, or texture.

Action required

- ☐ No suspicious changes: Continue routine monitoring.
- ☐ New or persistent localized discoloration: Contact a reptile veterinarian.
- ☐ Blisters, ulcers, discharge, or suspected necrosis: Arrange urgent veterinary assessment.
- ☐ Weakness, abnormal breathing, or loss of coordination: Seek emergency veterinary care.

Important: Do not peel scales, puncture blisters, scrape lesions, or wait a full week to see whether suspicious skin damage progresses.

2. Humidity & Temperature Inspection

Check environmental conditions instead of relying on one hygrometer reading.

- ☐ Record relative humidity (RH) on the warm side.
- ☐ Record relative humidity (RH) on the cool side.
- ☐ Check humidity inside the humid hide, if provided.
- ☐ Confirm that the thermometer and hygrometer are functioning correctly.
- ☐ Check warm-side and cool-side ambient temperatures.
- ☐ Verify that all applicable heating equipment is controlled by an appropriate thermostat.
- ☐ Check surface temperatures with an infrared thermometer.
- ☐ Look for excessive condensation or poor air circulation.

Practical humidity target

- [ ] Use an appropriate species-specific humidity target rather than chasing one fixed number.
- [ ] Maintain sufficient ambient humidity without keeping the entire enclosure floor wet.
- [ ] Reassess conditions when indoor heating or air conditioning changes seasonally.

3. Substrate Moisture & Hygiene Inspection

Check both the surface and the lower substrate layers.

- [ ] Touch the substrate surface in frequently used resting areas.
- [ ] Check underneath hides and around the water bowl.
- [ ] Inspect lower substrate layers for excessive moisture.
- [ ] Check for standing water or muddy, saturated bedding.
- [ ] Look for mold, unpleasant odors, or hidden waste.
- [ ] Remove feces and urates promptly.
- [ ] Replace contaminated or persistently wet substrate.
- [ ] Confirm that the snake has clean, appropriate resting surfaces.

Substrate moisture check

- [ ] Surface is not muddy or continuously wet.
- [ ] Moisture-retaining substrate is not waterlogged.
- [ ] No standing water is trapped underneath the bedding.
- [ ] No persistent mold or foul odor is present.

4. Humidity Gradient & Enclosure Setup

Create separate functional zones instead of soaking the entire enclosure.

- [ ] Provide a suitable warm-side retreat.
- [ ] Provide a suitable cool-side retreat.
- [ ] Maintain a clean, appropriately dry main substrate surface.
- [ ] Use suitable moisture-retaining substrate where appropriate.
- [ ] Provide a humid hide with lightly damp sphagnum moss if needed.
- [ ] Ensure the moss is moist but not dripping wet.
- [ ] Inspect the humid hide regularly for mold and contamination.
- [ ] Keep the water bowl clean and prevent spills.
- [ ] Maintain adequate ventilation without allowing excessive moisture loss.

If humidity is too low

- [ ] Check for excessive ventilation.
- [ ] Review substrate depth and moisture-retention properties.
- [ ] Consider whether the water bowl is appropriately sized.

- ☐ Add moisture carefully to suitable lower substrate layers when appropriate.
- ☐ Recheck humidity after adjustments.
- ☐ Avoid repeatedly spraying the snake and the entire enclosure floor.

5. Suspected Scale Rot: Immediate Response Checklist

If you discover suspicious belly discoloration or damaged scales:

- ☐ Take clear photographs of the affected area.
- ☐ Record when the changes were first noticed.
- ☐ Contact a qualified reptile veterinarian.
- ☐ Remove wet or contaminated substrate.
- ☐ Prepare a clean temporary enclosure with paper towel bedding if appropriate.
- ☐ Provide suitable temperature and humidity conditions.
- ☐ Keep clean water and a secure hide available.
- ☐ Replace soiled paper towels promptly.
- ☐ Keep equipment separate from other reptiles.
- ☐ Follow veterinary instructions for wound cleaning and medication.

Do NOT

- ☐ Scrub or peel damaged scales.
- ☐ Pop blisters or remove necrotic tissue.
- ☐ Apply concentrated chlorhexidine or iodine without veterinary guidance.
- ☐ Use alcohol or hydrogen peroxide on the lesion.
- ☐ Administer leftover antibiotics or human medications.
- ☐ Delay veterinary care while trying multiple home remedies.

6. Weekly Monitoring Record

Use this simple record to identify environmental changes and monitor your snake's condition.

Inspection item	Observation
Date	_____
Warm-side humidity	_____
Cool-side humidity	_____
Warm-side temperature	_____
Cool-side temperature	_____
Substrate surface condition	Dry / Slightly moist / Wet
Lower substrate condition	Dry / Moist / Saturated
Humid hide condition	Clean / Needs replacement

Inspection item	Observation
Belly appearance	Normal / Discoloration / Lesion
Waste and substrate condition	Clean / Needs maintenance
Changes since last inspection	_____

7. Final Prevention Check

Before finishing your enclosure inspection, confirm:

- ☐ My ball python has access to suitable ambient humidity.
- ☐ The main substrate surface is not persistently wet.
- ☐ The humid hide is clean and properly maintained.
- ☐ No contaminated bedding or hidden waste remains.
- ☐ Temperature and humidity are being monitored reliably.
- ☐ Heating equipment is properly regulated.
- ☐ I have recorded and photographed any suspicious skin changes.
- ☐ I know when to contact a reptile veterinarian.

The Golden Rule: Humid Air, Clean Bedding, Healthy Scales.
Your goal is not to keep the entire enclosure dry or constantly wet. It is to maintain appropriate humidity while preventing prolonged contact with saturated or contaminated substrate.

A Friendly Note Before You Go

Thanks for taking the time to check your snake's environment and health. Small, consistent husbandry checks can make it easier to notice changes early and give your ball python the care it needs.

This checklist is an educational husbandry tool, not a veterinary diagnosis or treatment plan. Belly discoloration can have several causes, and suspected scale rot should be assessed by a qualified reptile veterinarian. If you notice blisters, open sores, discharge, dark or damaged tissue, or changes in your snake's behavior or breathing, please seek veterinary care promptly. When in doubt, asking a reptile veterinarian is always a good next step.

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