

## Distemper Vaccinations In Ferrets

### Is it safe to skip a distemper vaccination in ferrets?

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**Q:** I have 12 ferrets. A veterinarian told me that as long as I don't bring my ferrets outside or introduce them to other ferrets, I only need to give them the distemper vaccination about every three years. Is this true, or should I stick with every year? We also have three cats that do not go outside and one dog that does, but it doesn't come into contact with the ferrets.

**A:** The frequency in which ferrets receive canine distemper virus (CDV) vaccine is controversial. It is labeled for use as a once-a-year product. The company that produces the vaccine can only guarantee that the product protects ferrets for one year. But there are people who feel that the vaccine works past one year and could be good for at least three years. There is no data to support this, just hunches.

Recently, many veterinarians and researchers have begun to question the safety of giving frequent vaccines to animals. They claim the effectiveness of many vaccines in our pets lasts much longer than is on the label. The downside to frequent vaccination is possible immune system disorders and possible cancers at the site of vaccination. These concerns have occupied those who do dog and cat medicine for a number of years.

Due to the way ferrets are vaccinated, vaccine site cancer is less of a threat than in cats. And ferrets do not seem to develop the immune disorders that are seen over a lifetime as in some dogs and cats. So, if we can minimize the number of vaccines a ferret receives over its lifetime, there is nothing wrong with that as it might decrease a ferret's chances of developing a problem, as long as there is adequate protection against a fatal disease like CDV.

If your ferrets are not exposed to other ferrets, dogs or other animals that can carry distemper, then you might be fine waiting every three years to vaccinate. At this time, my recommendation is that ferrets should be vaccinated as the label states &mdash; once a year &mdash; because CDV is a fatal disease in almost every ferret. If you choose to vaccinate less frequently, know that your ferret could be at risk for contracting a disease that we have no cure for.