

Treating Ferrets With ECE

What is the best way to treat ferrets with epizootic catarrhal enteritis (ECE)?

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Q: I run a ferret rescue. I have six ferrets so far, with another two coming to me soon. I suspected that my ferrets might have been exposed to ECE and asked the woman who relinquished the last two ferrets to me. She told me the ferrets were carriers of ECE. I'm concerned about whether the ferrets are getting the right treatment.

I keep them hydrated and feed them their vitamin supplements daily. They won't eat Duck Soup, so I sprinkle it on their food. I also give them small amounts of yogurt to help with digestion. They all seem happy and healthy, but they have mucous in their stool. Their coats are still nice and they are eating, but they have some minimal weight loss that has me concerned.

The ferrets are on azithromycin to treat secondary infection, if there is any. I am giving them extra water through a syringe once a day. They aren't losing any more weight, but they aren't putting any on either. Tomorrow I will try some pedialyte. Is this the right treatment? The vets in my small town have little to no experience with exotics.

A: You ask a very difficult question. Even if the ferrets have been exposed to epizootic catarrhal enteritis (ECE), you do not know if they will get the disease and show signs of the disease. If the ferrets have never been sick, you may not need to treat them.

Giving the ferrets an antibiotic to treat a secondary infection in a disease that the ferrets may not have could lead to antibiotic resistance, making it much harder to treat an infection if one occurs.

Yogurt is not part of a normal ferret's diet; that by itself could be causing the mucous in the stool or the antibiotic could be doing that.

What you may want to do is to find a veterinarian in your area who will work with you and your rescue. There are many online resources for veterinarians to answer their questions. Then rather than treating for a disease that might not be present, a veterinarian could tell you the likely chance that your ferrets may have ECE.

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