

Can Ferrets Give People Diseases?

Should people be concerned about their ferrets making them sick?

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Q: I'd love to get a ferret, but there are some health hazards I've been cautioned about, and I just want to get a professional, second opinion on these concerns.

- 1) Are the diseases ferrets carry super deadly and something I should be super concerned about for my health, or is it something I should keep an eye out for and not stress about?
- 2) What are the most deadly diseases ferrets can give to humans, and can they get vaccinated against these deadly diseases? Are all ferrets carriers, or is it just a possibility?
- 3) What are the vaccinations you recommend most for ferrets?
- 4) What diseases can be transferred from ferret to human? What vaccinations do I get so I don't have to worry about my parents, my siblings, my ferret or me getting sick?

A: There are very few diseases that ferrets can give to healthy people with a healthy immune system. If anyone in the house does not have a healthy immune system, any pet can transmit serious diseases. These people include but are not limited to infants, the elderly, those on chemotherapy, those on organ transplant medication, and those with damaged immune systems, such as people infected with HIV. If there is anyone who falls into these categories, then that person should have a long talk with their physician to decide if there is any pet that is appropriate to have in the house.

If everyone in your house has a healthy immune system, there is absolutely no reason to be super concerned about disease being spread by ferrets to people.

There are two diseases that ferrets can get that they can spread to people. The same strains of influenza can infect both people and ferrets. Ferrets can give the flu to people and people can give the flu to ferrets. It has been shown that the flu strain, H1N1, can infect ferrets. In most people and most ferrets, influenza is a mild respiratory disease that goes away on its own.

The other disease that people can get from ferrets is rabies. But rabies in ferrets almost never occurs and should never be a problem if your ferret is properly vaccinated for rabies.

There are other "potential" diseases that ferrets can get that theoretically they can give to people because people can get the same disease. This includes Giardia, cryptosporidia, mycobacteria and fungal infections. But transmission of these diseases between people and ferrets has not been shown to occur.

If you do get a ferret, besides a rabies vaccination, the other disease that ferrets need to be vaccinated against is canine distemper virus.

Again, it is important to repeat, if anyone in the house or anyone who comes in contact with a ferret has a less than healthy immune system, then please talk to your physician about how wise it is to bring any pet into your house. But if everyone has a very healthy immune system, a ferret is one of the safest pets you can have.

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