

## Can Antibiotic Ointment Prevent Flu Infection In Ferrets?

**Does antibiotic ointment in a ferrets nostrils help it fight off the flu?**

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**Q:** I read that part of the reason doctors and nurses rarely get sick is that they use triple antibiotic ointment on the inside of their nostrils. I asked my doctor about this and he confirmed it but said they also use a stronger one that's prescription if they expect to be around someone terribly contagious. They also have built up immunity. I tried it when I went shopping the other day and it felt OK, no smell. I just took a cotton swab and went just on the inside edge. Is this something we can use to help our ferrets avoid catching the flu?

**A:** This is one of those persistent urban myths. Firstly, flu or influenza is caused by a virus, not bacteria. Antibiotics only treat bacteria, not viruses. So the use of an antibiotic ointment cannot stop a viral infection.

Use of an ointment or moisturizer on mucus membranes, however, may help to prevent viral infections. The delicate membranes in the nasal cavity are the first line of defense against colonization and infection of respiratory viruses. If these membranes are dried or cracked, they are less useful to prevent infection. By placing an ointment or moisturizer on those membranes, especially since those membranes easily dry out in the winter, it may be possible to prevent flu infections.

That all being said, I would not want to try it on a ferret without the assistance of a veterinarian. Ointments can be thick and gooey and could possibly "plug" the small nares of your ferret. If you are interested in using this method to prevent infections in your ferret, talk to your veterinarian to see what type of ointments he or she recommends.

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