

Ferret Falls Ill After Arrival Of Newcomer

Is ferret's illness the result of disease from newcomer or something else?

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Q: We own two ferrets, Bob the boy and Jay the girl. They have been doing just fine. We recently took in another baby boy. After he arrived, Jay started acting strangely — sleeping more than usual, throwing up and having diarrhea. She has been doing this for a couple of days now, and we are worried. We're not sure if the new ferret carried something back from the pet shop. Bob and the baby are fine. We were told that Jay might have eaten something that blocked her stomach. We are just plain worried about her. Can you tell what's going on?

A: Fortunately, ferrets have very few infectious diseases that can be spread to other ferrets. That being said, there are some diseases to worry about. One of the most common diseases spread from ferret to ferret is epizootic catarrhal enteritis (ECE). What we usually see is a healthy-appearing ferret enter a household and, about 10 to 14 days later, one or more of the ferrets in the house becomes sick.

Signs of ECE include not eating, vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss and overall malaise. Sometimes, in mild forms of this disease, ferrets get better on their own. But mostly these ferrets need supportive care, such as assisted feedings, oral fluids and medications like antibiotics and gastrointestinal protectants.

Ferrets can also spread influenza to each other but usually there is a respiratory factor to this disease.

A very serious disease that can be spread is canine distemper virus, but it is very rare as vaccination prevents ferrets from getting canine distemper.

For Jay, I recommend you take her to the veterinarian to get a diagnosis and appropriate care for her.