

Recommended Vaccines & Vet Visits For Ferrets

Do ferrets require veterinary visits and vaccinations?

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Q: I have a 3-year-old female Marshall ferret, and I was wondering about rabies shots and parvo shots. The pet store I bought her from never mentioned vet visits and checkups. She remains very healthy and has a good diet of fish pellets and premium ferret food. Her only treats are Bandits. Our family does not have any other pets, and I only walk her outside in the summer.

A: Ferrets need to be protected with vaccines from two diseases: rabies virus and canine distemper virus. Both diseases are fatal in ferrets.

Parvo, a severe diarrheal disease seen in dogs, is a different type of disease in ferrets. The parvo virus in ferrets is Aleutian disease virus, and we do not have a vaccine to prevent that disease.

Rabies virus vaccination is mandatory in some cities because rabies is fatal to ferrets, people and other animals. The rabies vaccine approved for ferrets should be used. Even if your ferret is never in contact with any other animals, it may be required by your municipality to vaccinate your ferret.

Canine distemper virus (CDV) is also prevented in ferrets by a vaccine. There is only one approved vaccine for ferrets that is available to your veterinarian. This is more controversial than the rabies virus vaccine. The reason this is controversial is that a small percentage of ferrets that receive this vaccine can have a reaction to the vaccine. Therefore, it is important to discuss this vaccine with your veterinarian. If you believe that the risk of your ferret contracting CDV is very small but the risk of a vaccine reaction is high, then maybe you want to consider not using the vaccine. In most cases, the risk of a reaction is very small and the risk of getting CDV is higher. Even if you take your ferret outside only during the summer, your ferret can still be in contact with this disease. Other ferrets, dogs, raccoons and skunks can carry this virus. If your ferret comes in contact with an animal carrying CDV, it can become sick and die.

There is good reason for your ferret to be vaccinated against canine distemper virus even if there are no other animals in your house, because you never know when contact might occur. You might expect it at a park, but what about unexpected places, like an emergency pet hospital?

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