

## The Most Common Viruses That Infect Ferrets

**A list of 5 viruses that ferret owners need to guard against.**

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The below list summarizes, in no particular order, a few viruses that ferret owners need to guard against. Two of these have vaccines to prevent possible infection; for the others, the only preventive measure is eliminating exposure. This can be difficult, because viruses such as canine distemper can be brought home on an owner's shoes or clothing.

- 1) Epizootic catarrhal enteritis (ECE): This coronavirus causes excessive diarrhea and green-colored stool in affected ferrets. It is highly contagious and can spread through direct ferret-to-ferret contact or contact with infected items such as bedding or caging. With proper treatment, otherwise healthy ferrets can usually overcome the illness. No vaccine exists for ECE.
- 2) Aleutian disease virus (ADV): This parvovirus can cause many different symptoms or none at all. A ferret may be infected for years before showing symptoms. Chronic wasting and lethargy are two common symptoms when any surface. It is highly contagious and can spread through direct ferret-to-ferret contact or contact with infected items such as bedding or caging. No vaccine or treatment exists for ADV. Owners can only make the ferret as comfortable as possible for the weeks, months or years that it might survive.
- 3) Canine distemper virus (CDV): This RNA virus is virtually 100 percent fatal in ferrets that contract it. Infected ferrets typically have nasal and eye discharge that worsens, swollen eyes and nose, and hardened foot pads, among other symptoms. No treatment exists. An annual vaccine provides protection against CDV. A few ferrets experience adverse reactions to vaccines. Talk to your veterinarian to determine the best choice for your ferret.
- 4) Rabies is caused by a rhabdovirus: It causes multiple symptoms, including hind-end paralysis, fever, tremors and hyperactivity. The exact methods the virus uses to spread are still under study, but it most commonly occurs when an animal is exposed to an infected animal (alive or dead). No treatment exists for rabies, so infected ferrets must be euthanized. An annual rabies vaccination provides protection against the disease, and many state and city laws require owners to vaccinate their ferrets. A few ferrets experience adverse reactions to vaccines. Talk to your veterinarian to determine the best choice for your ferret.
- 5) Influenza: Ferrets are susceptible to the influenza virus type A and B that affects humans. This means that if you have the flu, you can give it to your ferret -- which in turn can pass it to another ferret or human. Symptoms usually include respiratory problems. Most adult ferrets that are otherwise healthy recover from the flu in about a week. Usually no treatment is required beyond supportive care.