

B i r d & E x o t i c s V e t e r i n a r i a n

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Ferret Distemper Virus

1. What is Ferret Distemper Virus?

'Ferret Distemper' is a viral disease which is present in the dog population of Australia. Despite being a disease of dogs the virus is able to infect ferrets.

2. How is the virus transmitted?

The virus is spread by inhaling particles of virus from the air, contact with urine and faeces or from direct contact with dogs and other ferrets. The virus can survive on your hands for up to 20 minutes after touching an affected animal.

3. What are the clinical signs?

- Skin inflammation or irritation of the chin
- Swelling and crusting of the lips
- Eye discharge and light sensitivity
- Thickening of the foot pads in long term cases
- Anorexia (not eating)
- Lethargy
- Fever
- Pruritis (severe itching)
- Death occurs in almost 100% of cases

4. Which ferrets are most at risk?

Any ferret in contact with dogs or other ferrets are most at risk.

5. How do I protect my ferret?

It is extremely important that all ferrets be regularly vaccinated against distemper virus to prevent the disease. Once they have the disease, hospital treatments are unlikely to help and most will die. Our recommended vaccination program is:

- First vaccination at 8 weeks of age and then repeat booster at 12 weeks of age.
- Unvaccinated adult ferrets require an initial vaccine and a booster 4 weeks later.
- Booster vaccines are due every 12 months.

6. Are there any risks to vaccination?

In very rare cases a reaction may occur to the vaccine within the first 30 minutes. If this happens the ferret will require veterinary attention to reduce the allergic reaction.