

## Ferrets and the Flu

It's flu season! If you're a ferret owner, that means extra worry about your furry little family members. Ferrets are susceptible to several strains of human influenza virus, which is spread through the air from coughing, sneezing, and other respiratory secretions. The virus is not only spread from human to ferret, but ferret to ferret and ferret to human as well.

If you have the flu, avoid close contact with your ferret and have another person provide his care during your illness, if at all possible. If you must handle your ferret while you're sick, wash your hands before and after handling your ferret and avoid having him near your face.

Similar to humans, symptoms of flu in ferrets usually begin with a fever. As the fever subsides, signs of upper respiratory illness ensue. Coughing, sneezing, thick nasal discharge, and watery eyes can all be seen. Often, they become lethargic and refuse to eat. Gastrointestinal signs, such as vomiting or diarrhea may also be seen.

Most healthy adult ferrets will recover in 7 to 14 days with good supportive care. Force-feeding and fluids, either oral or injectable, will be needed in most cases. Sometimes, cough suppressants, decongestants, or antibiotics are prescribed. Very young or very old ferrets are most likely to develop life-threatening complications such as pneumonia.

Contact your exotic animal veterinarian quickly when you suspect a respiratory illness. Other diseases, such as heart disease and deadly canine distemper virus, can look similar to influenza. Early treatment for many conditions can mean the difference between a quick recovery and devastating illness.

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