

## Ferret Canine Distemper (CD) FACT Sheet

Ferret Association of Connecticut - July 2011

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| Affected Animals      | <p>CD is considered highly contagious in ferrets. It has been generally accepted that few unprotected animals will survive the disease. A very few fortunate ferrets have survived the disease, but rarely without long term health complications. Therefore prevention is critical.</p> <p>CD is more rare today than it was before people began proactively getting CD vaccinations for their pets. This demonstrates the broad protection proper vaccination can provide. However, it still exists and should not be treated lightly.</p> <p>Several wild species of animals like fox, coyotes, raccoons, skunk, mink, and seals can also contract or harbor the canine distemper virus (CDV). Ferret owners with dogs who have the potential to interact with wildlife need to be especially cautious and ensure their dog and ferrets are properly vaccinated and up-to-date.</p> <p><b>CD does not affect humans.</b> Cats cannot contract the canine version of distemper. Feline distemper is a similarly dangerous but unrelated virus.</p>   |
| How Does It Spread    | <p>Most times the disease is spread by direct animal-to-animal contact (saliva contact from sneezes, drooling, etc.) Fortunately, the virus cannot survive for long in the environment – usually only a few hours. There are exceptions, but they are highly unusual circumstances.</p> <p>While animal interactions with a surface deposit of the CDV (for example, sniffing fresh urine of an infected animal), the risk of infection, while not impossible, is not the more common route of infection. However, the fact that it can survive for even a short time is very important to those handling infected animals and preventing possible transmission to uninfected animals. Therefore, precautionary measures should be taken as outlined below.</p>  |
| Protect Your Pets     | <p>There are highly effective dog and ferret approved vaccines available that have been shown to protect most animals from the virus. In ferrets, veterinarians recommend an initial series of 3 CD shots spaced 2 to 3 weeks apart around age 8 weeks, 11 - 12 weeks and the third at age 14 – 16 with an approved ferret vaccine. (As of July, 2011, only Purevax-D<sup>®</sup> by Merial Canada is approved for use in ferrets.) Ferrets with an unknown history of CD vaccinations should have 2 shots spaced 3 weeks apart. All ferrets should receive an annual booster shot thereafter.</p> <p><b><i>It is important to note that unless an owner was provided with a vaccination record for that specific animal, most ferrets purchased from a pet shop have only had 1 initial shot and should receive at least 1 or 2 additional booster shots following purchase. If there is no record, contact and follow your veterinarian's advice for appropriate booster vaccinations.</i></b></p> <p>Also be aware, that no vaccine is 100% effective. It is always important to be aware of unusual symptoms in your pet and to contact a veterinarian immediately if you have any concerns.</p> |
| Preventing Its Spread | <p>Animals can carry the CD virus and not show any symptoms of illness, particularly if they have been appropriately vaccinated (not unlike how the flu can be “carried” via vaccinated humans). Frequent hand washing and care following any interaction with other animals before handling your own animals is prudent. Not only can it help stop the spread of animal viruses like CDV but it can also help protect people from zoonotic diseases (diseases that can be passed from animals to humans).</p> <p>It is not necessary to use antibacterial products; in fact, studies have shown that they are actually contributing to resistant strains of bacteria. Thorough hand washing with soap and water is considered a highly effective means of reducing the spread of many illnesses. Hand sanitizers that are alcohol based can also be used.</p>   |

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|  | <p>If you are handling animals that you know may have been exposed to a disease, additional precautions are urged. Wash any exposed areas of skin thoroughly with soap and water; and change outer clothing and shoes before handling your own pets if you have been handling infected or exposed animals.</p> <p>It is also suggested you do the same after touching animals in public places such as farms, pet stores, dog parks, fairs, etc. Most of the time the animals there are healthy, but a change of clothes (and leaving your shoes somewhere to dry out completely if you may have walked through any animal waste) can help avoid unnecessary risks.</p> <p>In shelters or pet stores with multiple species, it is important to ensure that employees and the public thoroughly sanitize their hands before handling another species.</p>  |
| <p>Early Identification in Ferrets</p> | <p>Not all ferrets develop the same symptoms at the same rate or sequence. The most common signs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retching or vomiting;</li> <li>• Reddening of the skin around the chin and mouth progressing rapidly (usually within 24-36 hours) to the groin and rectal area;</li> <li>• A red rash over the entire body;</li> <li>• Conjunctivitis - swelling (inflammation) or infection of the eyelids eventually leading to light sensitivity, complete eye closure and crusting over the closed eyes;</li> <li>• Rectal prolapse;</li> <li>• Swelling of the legs and eventual crusting on the footpads;</li> <li>• Nasal discharge with eventual crusting;</li> <li>• Sores developing on the chin, feet and around the anus.</li> </ul> <p>Any of these symptoms warrant veterinary consultation. More than one and it should be treated as an emergency. Your veterinarian can help you decide on treatment based on the precise symptoms you are observing.</p> <p>If you think that your ferret may have been exposed to CD, contact your veterinarian immediately to decide what precautions to take.</p> |
| <p>Treatments</p>                      | <p>CD is a very dangerous and almost always fatal disease in ferrets. Presently there is no single treatment protocol that has been shown to cure a ferret that exhibits symptoms. While there have been rare reports of individual ferrets surviving, it has required early, aggressive and nearly round the clock supportive therapy over a period of months.</p> <p>In the 20-year history of the Ferret Association of Connecticut, this has been the first outbreak we have experienced in spite of housing and adopting over 1,400 ferrets. Fortunately, we have not learned of any similar outbreak in a ferret shelter in the New England and tri-state area in as many years.</p>  |