



14 Sherbrooke Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106-3838

ferret-fact.org

Ferret Covid Concerns Revisited

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By L. Vanessa Gruden, Executive Director

Since last summer, people have relaxed about their ferrets casually catching Covid-19. But a couple situations have driven us to reissue cautions for owners.

Ferrets CAN catch covid. It's why so many are being used in Covid research. In NORMAL homes, the risk is small so there's no need to be hysterical about sanitizing. However, there is an exception: If you and other family members contract the disease.

There was one confirmed case in Europe of a ferret contracting Covid from their humans. A recent study in Spain found ferrets in multiple households had Covid antibodies, though the caretaker Covid rate was undetermined. And we've had two local situations where it seems to have also occurred. In both the local cases, the entire family had Covid. The ferrets had respiratory illnesses and lung scans showed the typical "covid lung" opacities seen in humans.

In research labs, in order to deliberately infect ferrets with covid, concentrated doses are used and applied very directly to the animals' nostrils. When a family group all contracts the virus, they essentially replicate the lab's concentrated exposure. If, in addition, there are ill children or adults who want to "snuggle" with the ferret near their face, the risk rises.

The Ferret Association continues to recommend if you or a household member is diagnosed with Covid-19, limit handling of pet ferrets. If possible, ask an uninfected friend to care for the ferrets. Safest is to remove the ferrets to another home until the family is covid-free. CDC recommendations about handling pets if you contract covid can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/pets.html>

Don't put your ferrets in your face! It's a bad practice at any time, exposing them to colds or flus before you know you're ill. With asymptomatic spread of Covid-19, you may have no symptoms at all but still pass the virus to your ferret.

The good news is most ferrets will recover if signs of illness are caught quickly, before they become severely anorexic or dehydrated. Fluids and supportive care can pull your pet through. But with the high cost of vet care, why take that chance?

Thoughtful owners should also consider the potential for Covid variants arising. Mink easily catch Covid from humans and become seriously ill. While not formally established, health officials worry mink may could pass it back to humans. There are also environmental fears that escaped farm mink may pass the covid virus to mustelids like wild mink, weasels and river otters. Should a variant that increases transmission from people to domestic ferrets develop, the effect on our pet ferrets could be tragic.

Covid-19 is still circulating. Sensible precautions are the best defense to keeping our pets safe.

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