

might suggest pre-treating the ferret next time anyway, in case it helps.

Pre-treating your ferret with an antihistamine is no guarantee against a reaction, but it won't hurt. Typically 1cc of oral children's/ infant strength Benadryl is given 20-30 minutes before vaccination.

### Can I vaccinate my own ferrets?

It's not recommended. Giving an injection to a squirming or nippy animal is not easy. Even experienced veterinarians with good technicians sometimes get bitten. In the case of a bad reaction to the vaccine, a vet has the experience and equipment on hand which may be needed to save the ferret's life.

In addition, a licensed veterinarian's signature is required for a rabies certificate to be legal. The yearly trip to the vet (or twice a year for older ferrets) is also the best time to have your ferrets checked for other problems.

However, if you have a lot of ferrets to be vaccinated, you may be able to save yourself some money by purchasing the vaccines directly from the manufacturer and taking them to your vet to be used. You save on materials, but you still get your vet's expertise. Check with your vet to see if he or she will work with you like this.

*This pamphlet does not cover all aspects of ferret medical care. If you have more questions please contact your vet or the TRFC.*



# Ferret Vaccinations

Ferrets are rapidly becoming the third most popular pet in the United States. However, many vets are still not familiar with them. This brochure does not in any way take the place of a licensed veterinarian, but will provide insights on important ferret medical information every ferret owner should know. If you suspect something is wrong with your ferret, please have a veterinarian see him immediately.

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A 501(c)3 non-profit organization

Based on information found at Ferret Central  
<http://www.ferretcentral.org>

Revised January 2004

## Distemper

Ferrets require canine distemper vaccination. There are two USDA-approved vaccines for use in ferrets, Fervac-D (made by United Vaccine) and Purevax-D (made by Merial). The manufacturer recommends shots (1 ml subcutaneously) at 8, 11 and 14 weeks, then a yearly booster shot. Although rabies gets more press, the canine distemper vaccine is *much* more important to your ferret's health.

Canine distemper is extremely contagious. Keeping your ferret indoors is no protection against this deadly disease. Vaccination is the only protection. There is no cure — canine distemper has a 100% fatality rate.

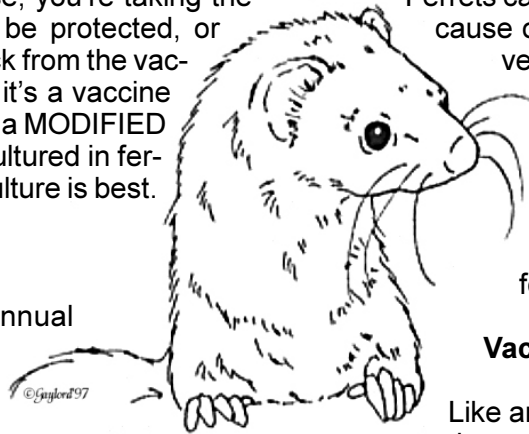
Adults who have never been vaccinated, or whose vaccination status is unknown, should get two canine distemper shots, three weeks apart, then yearly boosters. If you know they've been vaccinated within the last year, one shot is enough.

If you can't get Fervac-D or Purevax, or if your ferret has reacted to them in the past, Galaxy-D is an acceptable third choice. Galaxy-D is NOT recognized by the USDA as acceptable for use in ferrets, nor do most ferret organization accept it for events and shows.

If you can't get any of these, you're taking the risk that your ferret won't be protected, or worse, that he'll become sick from the vaccine. At least be sure that it's a vaccine for canine distemper that is a MODIFIED LIVE virus and was NOT cultured in ferret tissue. Chick embryo culture is best.

## Rabies

Ferrets also require an annual Imrab-3 rabies vaccine. One subcutaneous vaccination at 14-16 weeks old, preferably separated from



the distemper vaccines by 2-3 weeks, and then boosters yearly. This is the same rabies vaccine that is used for dogs and cats, so your vet should have it. It's good for three years in cats, but only one year in ferrets, mainly because the company has not done tests to see how long it lasts in ferrets. (This is the only rabies vaccine approved for ferrets.)

Having your ferret vaccinated against rabies is your only protection from having your ferret killed and tested if he should bite or scratch someone. Since the Rabies Compendium was modified, vaccinated ferrets are placed in quarantine for 10 days the same as dogs. If you are lucky, having the vaccination may keep the person from reporting a bite in the first place, and of course, it will protect your ferrets from getting rabies. (Even closely watched ferrets do occasionally escape.)

## Other Vaccinations

Ferrets should not be vaccinated for feline distemper or parvo, given a 5-way dog vaccine, or be given any other vaccine except those listed above. Giving incorrect vaccines have been known to make ferrets sick.

Ferrets can contract Bordatella (a common cause of kennel cough in dogs), but it's very rare, and the effectiveness of the vaccine is unknown. Don't vaccinate for it unless you will be boarding your ferrets at a kennel, and possibly not even then. The intranasal Bordatella vaccine has been known to *give* ferrets the disease.

## Vaccine Reactions

Like any other animal, ferrets can have adverse reactions to vaccinations, usu-

ally on the second or third exposure to a particular vaccine. Reactions are fairly common, but giving the rabies and distemper vaccinations 2-3 weeks apart is one way to help reduce the chance of a reaction.

There are several kinds of vaccine reactions. Anaphylactic reactions are the most dangerous and usually occur within an hour after the vaccination. You should always stay at your vet's for 30-60 minutes after a vaccination, just in case. Watch for vomiting, diarrhea or loss of bladder/bowel control; signs of nausea or dizziness; dark bluish-purple blotches spreading under the skin; difficulty breathing; pale or bright pink gums, ears, feet or nose; seizures, convulsions, passing out or anything else that's alarming — bad reactions are hard to miss. Get the ferret back to the vet right away, probably for a shot of antihistamine (Benadryl) and perhaps a corticosteroid or epinephrine.

Ferrets who have had mild to moderate anaphylactic reactions to a particular vaccine can be pre-treated with an antihistamine the next time, or you might consider switching to a different vaccine (from Fervac to Purevax, for example). If your ferret had a severe reaction, you and your vet can discuss the relative dangers of leaving that ferret unvaccinated.

Most delayed reactions aren't dangerous. You might notice the ferret acting tired, showing flu-like symptoms, feeling like he has a fever, or possibly even vomiting a little within a day or two after the vaccination. As long as the symptoms don't last longer than a day and don't seem too extreme, there's no need to worry. If the ferret has trouble breathing, is more than a little lethargic, or shows other worrisome symptoms, call or visit your vet. Antihistamines don't help much with delayed reactions, but your vet

