

# Rabies in Ferrets

## *Information for the Ferret Owner*

Rabies is a virus that infects the nervous system of animals and humans. Left untreated, it is almost 100% fatal.

Rabies occurs in New England primarily in the raccoon, bat and fox populations. Very few cases of rabies had been found in New Hampshire up until 1992. At that time, an epidemic in the raccoon population arrived at the Southern Border of New Hampshire. In 1992, there was a 33.3 percent increase in the cases of diagnosed rabies in the animal population. Massachusetts saw a 40 percent increase and Maine saw a 400% increase.<sup>1</sup>

### **Rabies in Humans**

Secondary to the virus entering through a break in the skin, the virus slowly travels up the nerve to infect the brain. The virus is relatively short-lived outside of a body so direct contact is usually necessary for a person to be infected.

There is a highly effective treatment for rabies exposure in humans. It no longer consists of numerous injections through the belly button, but instead is limited to a short series of antibodies and vaccines given in the buttocks and arm.

There is also a preventative vaccine (just like in dogs and cats) against rabies. Consult your personal physician if you have any questions concerning rabies.

### **Rabies in Ferrets**

Fortunately ferrets seem very resistant to Rabies infection. Also there is a highly effective vaccine called Imrab3. Because of the Public Health concerns and much misinformation about ferrets attacking people, there are numerous legal roadblocks regarding vaccination and quarantine periods.

Currently studies are being performed on different strains of Rabies (fox strain, bat strain and so forth) to accurately determine how Rabies virus affects ferrets. These studies are lengthy and costly but we should have more information in a few years.

For now, the recommendation is to have your ferret vaccinated, not only for the ferret's protection but hopefully some legal immunity in case your ferret bites someone.

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<sup>1</sup>JAVMA, Dec 15, 1992. Vol. 201 #12, p. 1839.

