

Vaccine Reactions in Ferrets

Information for the Ferret Owner

Vaccines - Pros and Cons

Whether to vaccinate your ferret is a question that is asked a lot now. It is a well known fact that ferrets have a much higher incidence of vaccine reactions than dogs or cats. Below is a brief discussion on the two vaccines that are commonly used for ferrets. In all cases, the manufacturers recommends yearly vaccination.

Distemper Vaccine

Distemper is a highly fatal disease of ferrets with mortality reaching 100%. It is an airborne virus that persists long in the environment and can stay on things such as clothes and still be infective to ferrets. The virus is the dog distemper virus so even contact with unvaccinated dogs can be a source of infection.

Unfortunately, most reactions I see are secondary to the distemper vaccine. I have not seen any difference in the amount or type of reactions between the most commonly used distemper vaccines available. The reaction can be potentially fatal, although this is the rare exception.

If your pet has had a reaction, you need to carefully weigh the pros and cons of whether to vaccinate your ferret again.

Rabies Vaccine

Rabies is a very, very uncommon disease in ferrets. The main reason to vaccinate your ferret is that it is State of New Hampshire State law. It is required annually. Once vaccinated, your ferret enjoys some legal protections against being destroyed if its bites someone.

I have had vaccine reactions after using the Rabies vaccine. There is currently only one approved vaccine that can be used for ferrets.

The vaccine reactions can be varied in their appearance but most are successfully treated with intensive medical support. For this reason, I usually recommend that your ferret be vaccinated at a veterinary hospital where appropriate measures can be quickly taken.

Medicating your ferret with 0.25 ml of pediatric liquid benadryl about 45 minutes before the vaccine appointment greatly minimizes the chance of a reaction.



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