

Influenza in Ferrets: Signs, Diagnosis, Treatment, and Prevention

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Ferrets are susceptible to the same strains of influenza as people. The influenza virus can be transmitted from ferrets to humans and vice versa.

What are the signs of influenza in ferrets?

In general, influenza causes only mild disease in ferrets. The affected animal may sneeze and have clear nasal discharge, cough (usually at night), be listless, or have a fever, poor appetite, diarrhea, and rarely, vomiting. The animal may also have mild conjunctivitis with clear drainage from the eyes, and be sensitive to light. Signs will usually last 1-2 weeks. Baby ferrets usually have more severe signs, and are more prone to develop secondary bacterial infections.

How is influenza in ferrets diagnosed?

Physical examination, and the history of recent exposure to a human or ferret with influenza suggest influenza. Other diseases, such as [lymphosarcoma](#), intestinal viral infections, or early [canine distemper](#) may cause similar signs. Laboratory testing may be necessary to distinguish between influenza and these diseases. Ferrets with canine distemper usually have ocular and nasal discharge that is white or yellow and thicker, have less coughing and sneezing, have a higher temperature for a longer period of time, and ultimately die of the disease.

How is influenza in ferrets treated?

In general, influenza in ferrets is self-limiting, which means the animal usually recovers on his own without intervention. Supportive care in the form of encouraging the ferret to eat and drink may be necessary, as well as keeping the area around the eyes and nose clean. Antihistamines may be given if the signs become severe. Since this is a viral infection, antibiotics are not given unless there is a secondary bacterial infection.

How is influenza prevented?

Persons exposed to, having signs of, or recovering from influenza should not handle ferrets. If handling is necessary, the person should wear a mask, and wash hands well before and after handling the ferret. Vaccination is not recommended.