

Bringing Your New Ferret Home

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Getting a new pet and bringing him home for the first time is always an exciting experience. We want to make sure it is a healthy and safe one, too.

Before you bring your kit home:

Have [housing](#) ready for him, which will include a cage that should contain a:

- [Litter box](#) with a very low entrance
- Water bottle and a clip-on dish of water
- Food container (crook or clip-on), with the food he is accustomed to
- Sleeping tube or other nest

Be sure you have checked your house for possible dangers and have followed recommendations on [ferret-proofing your home](#).

Care for pet shop kits

Baby ferrets arrive at pet shops when they are only 7 weeks old. They generally have traveled by both plane and truck to get there. Depending on the season, they may have been very hot or too cold for hours at a time. They may have had surgery a week before, and have been grouped with different ferrets a few times by the day of their arrival. At the pet shop, they are exposed to other species of animals, usually dogs and cats, and often reptiles and birds as well. Their cage is unfamiliar and they may be given bedding and food different from what they are used to. The temperature in the pet shop may be too warm and dry for them. There are new sounds and smells and many people looking at them and sometimes handling them when they just want to sleep or eat. Their whole routine is changed.

Fortunately, ferrets have a very philosophical outlook. They enjoy new experiences if they have good food and a comfortable place to sleep. However, all the changes they experience are stressful. Stress increases susceptibility to [respiratory infections](#) and [parasites](#) at a time when they are exposed to new infections and parasites from some people or animals they meet.

Most of the time, pet shop ferrets remain healthy. To minimize stress, allow your new ferret time to adjust to his (or her) new home. Don't let everyone in the neighborhood come in and handle him. Keep him in a cool, not a very warm area, and make sure he has a cozy nest to sleep in.

Remember that your kit is just a baby and needs to sleep a lot. Baby ferrets play very enthusiastically for an hour or so, then want to curl up for a nap. Especially for the first week you have him, allow him to do this whenever he wants to. He will be out of the baby stage in only a few weeks and then will have greater endurance than you do.

Health concerns

Respiratory problems in young ferrets: Sometimes kits get colds at the pet shop or while traveling through airports on their way there. The kit may be normal for a day or two after you take him (or her) home, then starts sneezing. He will get better much sooner if he has a cool, quiet spot to live in. If your new ferret starts to sneeze and has a runny nose a few days after bringing him home, keep his nose clean so that he can breathe and eat, and moisten his food with warm water to make it more palatable. If he seems very sick or has a persistently runny nose with a yellow or white discharge, make an appointment to have a veterinarian examine him. Most ferrets with colds, like most people, feel much better after 3 or 4 days. Sometimes, though, they need antibiotics to help clear up the infection.

Veterinary care and vaccinations for pet shop ferrets: A pet shop kit has probably had a temporary [distemper](#) vaccination before leaving the breeding farm, but this is not going to protect him after he is 9 weeks old. He must receive at least two, and preferably three distemper vaccinations, to protect him against this deadly disease. Find out how old the kit is before leaving the shop, so you will know when to schedule his [vaccinations and veterinary exams](#). Until he has been properly vaccinated, protect him from exposure to distemper virus by not allowing him outside, even on a leash. Minimize contact with dogs, or with strangers who can carry the virus to him on their hands and clothing.

Every kit should have a veterinary check-up by the time he is 9 weeks old, which should include his first permanent distemper vaccination and a stool test for parasites.

Fleas: If you have cats or dogs with [fleas](#), you can expect the ferret to get fleas, too. Try to get the other pets treated before you take the kit home. House the kit as far as possible from the cat or dog's favorite sleeping area, where most of the immature fleas will be waiting for a new host. A heavy burden of fleas can cause severe anemia in a small kit.