

COVID-19 mythbusting series

How do we handle ferrets in the veterinary environment?

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RCVS Knowledge COVID-19 myth-busting - how should we handle or treat the ferret in the practice or rescue environment? Handling ferrets in practice.

Ferrets are low risk of natural infection with SARS-CoV-2, there is minimal risk to the ferret from a handling in a veterinary environment. Ferret to human transmission has not been demonstrated yet, and there is no proven risk from the ferrets to veterinary staff. Ferrets can, however, become infected with SARS-CoV-2, and they can become clinically unwell. This is most likely when they live in close contact with the owner.

What do we do about handling ferrets with suspect COVID-19? Any unwell ferret coming from a situation where the owner has tested positive for COVID-19 can be a source of infection. Virus has been demonstrated in nasal discharge is saliva, urine, and faeces for up to eight days post-infection. Virus could therefore be present during direct handling of this animal or while handling fomites such as bowls, litter, trays, leads, harnesses, et cetera. In a veterinary surgery or a rescue setting, it is important to observe good biosecurity and always to use appropriate PPE.

Experimentally ferrets have been shown to be able to transmit SARS-CoV-2 to other ferrets, both by direct means and also via aerosol. So avoid housing infected ferrets in the same airspace as naive ferrets. This means that any infected ferret or suspect ferret should be kept in isolation and barrier nursed. Avoid cross-contamination by not moving cage furniture between ferrets and always wear appropriate PPE when handling ferrets. In a wildlife rescue situation, remember the other mustelids, so badgers, mink, otters, stoats, and weasels are also potentially susceptible to SARS-CoV-2. So take care to avoid transmitting this disease to a species that could become a wildlife reservoir.

For more free COVID-19 resources for veterinary professionals, visit
rcvsknowledge.org/covid-19



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