



COVID-19 mythbusting series

What advice should we give the owners of ferrets during the COVID-19 outbreak? COVID-19 Mythbuster

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What advice should we be giving the owners of ferrets during the COVID-19 outbreak? Firstly, I think we need to keep a sense of proportion and give appropriate but not scaremongering advice. So the first point is to not worry too much, there are potential risks but these are low, so advising owners to be careful and sensible is the first move. Ferrets can become infected with SARS-CoV-2, however, in most situations the risk of this is, in fact, low. So the risk to an owner from their ferret is low, it is not proven that ferrets can pass infection to humans. Humans are much more likely to become infected from another person than from their pet ferret, if a ferret does become infected with SARS-CoV-2, it is likely to be from an infected person rather than another animal.

Working ferrets and those ferrets kept outdoors are far less likely to become infected with COVID-19 because they are not in such close contact with their owners. Ferrets who do become unwell may develop a fever and lose their appetite if they become infected with SARS-CoV-2. The infection has been shown to spread between ferrets experimentally. A recent study of a colony of 29 ferrets being cared for by two adults who were sick with COVID-19 did not show any spread between the humans and the ferrets, and there were no cases found within that ferret colony. So that is quite a reassurance.

If there has been a case of COVID-19 confirmed in a home, it is wise for owners to avoid close contact with pet ferrets for 14 days after the infection is confirmed and certainly until symptoms resolve. And this may involve that ferret being taken into boarding facilities or into veterinary care. I would also advise owners to wash their hands thoroughly after handling their ferrets and anything in their ferrets' environment, so litter trays, bowls, toys etc. We also advise owners to avoid touching their face while handling ferrets and to not eat whilst interacting with them, and this is because that ferrets that have become infected with SARS-CoV-2 have been shown to shed virus in their nasal secretion, saliva, urine and faeces.

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



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