

Ferrets are a common research model for studying influenza virus and are used to help develop annual flu vaccines. For this reason, ferrets have been one of the first animals studied closely with various coronaviruses. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is caused by SARS-CoV-1 (a virus related to the cause of COVID-19) and can infect ferrets, usually causing a milder respiratory syndrome than in humans. The degree of illness caused by the virus in the ferret depends on the ferret's immune system, the virus strain, and the infective dose.

Further studies are being performed in laboratories to investigate how COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) will affect ferrets and reports are conflicting and in the early stages of review. Some studies suggest that ferrets can be infected with very large doses (requiring much higher amounts than seen in natural human infections) and with strains that may not occur in nature (laboratory produced). Ferrets that became positive for COVID-19 showed a fever and could transmit the virus to other ferrets. This information is an important steppingstone to understanding more about COVID-19. However, research is still in the early stages and generalizations about the susceptibility of ferrets to COVID-19 should be avoided at this time.

For pet owners (including ferret owners) with confirmed COVID-19 infections, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that a healthy household member be designated to care for animals in the home and that standard handwashing practices should be followed before and after handling pets. If that is not possible and a COVID-19 positive individual must care for the pets, the CDC recommends following strict handwashing procedures. These recommendations are to take every caution possible with this novel disease.

Most importantly, while ferrets may be at risk of being infected, they are not a primary source of infection and do not play a role in disease transmission at this time. Please do not abandon or surrender your pet ferrets due to COVID-19! Monitor your pet ferrets closely and call your veterinarian if you begin to notice any respiratory symptoms. Red Bank Veterinary Hospitals in Tinton Falls is still accepting ferrets as patients, and we will continue to do our best to provide your pet ferret with compassionate care. Should your ferret need evaluation at our hospital, please let us know if your ferret or anyone in your household is showing respiratory symptoms so that we may take the appropriate precautions to keep our staff safe. We are also accepting telehealth consultations for your ferret and other pets through the Airvet App.