

## General Regulations

### Rabies Vaccination

Ferrets over 12 weeks of age are required by Michigan law to have a current rabies vaccination administered by a veterinarian. Owners are required to show a valid rabies certificate as proof of vaccination upon request by appropriate authorities.

If a ferret bites or otherwise potentially exposes a person to rabies, the owner or witness must report the incident within 48 hours to the local public health department. The ferret will be handled in accordance with the *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control*. This means that the ferret will be quarantined for a 10-day period as per dogs and cats. If no clinical signs develop during that time period, then the ferret is considered to be incapable of having transmitted rabies to the bite victim.

### Importing Ferrets Into Michigan

A ferret cannot be imported into Michigan unless it is accompanied by an official interstate health certificate, signed by an accredited veterinarian, which includes a record of vaccinations. Ferrets over six weeks of age are required to have a current distemper vaccination, and those over 12 weeks of age are also required to have a current rabies vaccination.

A ferret less than six weeks of age shall not be imported into Michigan unless accompanied by its natural mother.

### Local Licensing of Ferrets

County, city, village or township governments may require licensing of ferrets similar to the licensing that has been established for dogs. Check with your local governing body to see if this applies to you.

### Leash Law

A ferret is not allowed to leave the owner's property unless it is confined or leashed and under the direct control of the owner or a responsible person designated by the owner. Ferrets running loose may be picked up by animal control authorities.

### Releasing a Ferret Into the Wild

It is illegal for a person to abandon a ferret or release a ferret into the wild. Ferrets released into the wild generally do not survive.

## Purchasing a Ferret from A Hobby Breeder

A hobby breeder may not sell a ferret before it is at least 10 weeks old. The hobby breeder must provide the ferret purchaser with a contract of sale stating that if the ferret purchaser can no longer keep the ferret, it must be returned to the breeder from whom it was purchased. The hobby breeder must take the ferret back without question or conditions placed on the animal's return. The contract must make it clear that the purchaser cannot sell, surrender, give or otherwise transfer the ferret to anyone except the original breeder.

### Caring for Your Ferret General Information

Ferrets are from the Mustelid family and are related to minks, otters, weasels and skunks. Their average life span is 5-11 years and they weigh from 1-5 pounds. Baby ferrets are called KITS. Females are called JILLS but when spayed are called SPRITES. Males are called HOBBS but when neutered are called GIBS.

Ferrets naturally emit a musky odor. If not descented, they can also produce an odor from their anal glands. The animal will express these glands when it is scared, extremely excited, or has a disease. This odor lasts for a few minutes. Your veterinarian can advise you about whether or not these glands should be removed.

### Feeding Your Ferret

Ferrets are carnivores, meaning they are strictly meat eaters! They can only utilize amino acids from meat proteins and cannot digest amino acids from plant proteins.

We suggest the use of high-quality ferret foods because they are made up of highly digestible top-quality meat proteins.

When checking the food label, make sure the protein level is 30 percent or more. Some people prefer to mix two or more kinds of high-quality ferret foods together, which is also acceptable.

Ferrets have a high dietary fat requirement (15%-20 percent). A diet with fat content LESS THAN this can lead to a dry brittle coat and itchy skin.

The first two ingredients should NOT be corn. Anything with fish meal will cause odor both in the food AND in your ferret.

Food should be fed dry unless there is a medical reason to do otherwise. As ferrets have a short gastrointestinal tract, they need to be fed frequently. Therefore, food should be left out to be eaten free choice.

Clean, fresh water should ALWAYS be available.

Ferrets have NO nutritional requirement for carbohydrates; they simply do not need them in their diet. Sticky, sugar rich cereals and dried fruits can cause plaque and contribute to poor oral health. They may be a factor in insulinoma or other diseases. In the case of cereals, the carbohydrate content is much higher. Highly processed, sugar rich foods ARE NOT good for ferrets.

While cereals and dried fruit have no real nutritional value for ferrets, they clearly provide a degree of satisfaction to the ferret. If fed sparingly, or used as a training aid, neither cereals nor dried fruit can cause much harm, particularly if the rest of the diet is complete and sound. For those that worry, or who have ferrets with health problems, meaty treats (poultry, pork, beef) should be substituted.

### Housing Suggestions

A ferret should be provided with a secure cage large enough for the ferret to move about and stretch out comfortably. The floor may be tight wire or solid. Ferrets are prone to heat stress in temperatures over 80 degrees, so the cage should allow adequate airflow for cooling. Heavy water bowls or water bottles are recommended because ferrets are known to tip over light containers. Ferrets will use a litterbox, so a litterbox is also advised.

When bringing a ferret home, it is not a good idea to let it run free immediately, as there is a greater chance the ferret could be injured in an unfamiliar environment. Be sure to "ferret-proof" the environment by blocking off areas where a ferret could hide or gain access, including the underside of furniture. Avoid exposure of the ferret to foam or latex rubber objects as ferrets like to chew and ingest rubber, which can result in an obstruction.

Ferrets like to sleep in a dark area. Therefore, it is recommended to provide a sleeping area in the cage. There are products designed specifically for ferrets to

sleep in including cloth tubes, tents, slings, and hammocks.

### **Common Health Problems of Ferrets**

Like all animals, ferrets are susceptible to many different ailments. Below are common diseases seen in ferrets. The list is not all inconclusive. Please consult with a veterinarian if you suspect your ferret is ill.

#### Adrenal Disease

Result of estrogen-secreting lesions of the cortex of the adrenal gland commonly resulting in hair loss. Females often have a swollen vulva and males often experience difficulties urinating.

#### Aleutian Disease

Infection from a parvovirus affecting the immune system. Animal may experience weight loss, difficulties walking, convulsions, black stools, and/or difficulties breathing.

#### Cardiomyopathy

Disease of the heart muscle. Animals may experience difficulties breathing, lethargy, coughing, weight loss, anorexia, and/or a fluid-filled abdomen.

#### Dental Disease

Two most common forms by far are periodontal disease and broken teeth.

#### Distemper

Distemper virus results in profound immunosuppression and systemic infections and culminates in death between 25-42 days. Ferrets often have diarrhea and "cold-like" signs.

#### Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis (ECE)

Diarrhea, presumably caused by a coronavirus, that usually develops shortly after introduction to a new, young ferret.

#### Gastric Ulcers:

Stress related. Basically, a hole in the lining of the stomach.

#### Heartworm Disease

A parasite that dwells in the heart and blood vessels which is transmitted by mosquitoes.

#### Helicobacter Mustelae Infection:

Stomach bacteria that can cause vomiting, diarrhea, anorexia, and/or weight loss.

#### Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Inflammation of the GI tract resulting in vomiting, diarrhea, and/or weight loss.

#### Influenza

Common problem in ferrets, especially in the winter months. The only species that shares the human flu virus, ferrets suffer much the same signs (sneezing, eye and nasal drainage, anorexia, and lethargy). Thus, influenza can be transmitted from human to ferret and from ferret to human.

#### Insulinoma

Insulin-secreting tumors of the pancreas. Signs may vary from bouts of weakness (especially in the hindlimbs) and lethargy to bouts of collapse where the ferret is minimally responsive.

#### Lymphoma (Aka Lymphosarcoma)

Cancer of lymphocytes, cells that regulate the immune system.

#### Proliferate Bowel Disease (PBD)

Bacterial infection of the GI tract which causes thickening of the intestine. Signs may include weight loss, dehydration, lethargy, and chronic diarrhea.

#### **Young Children and Animals**

Parents should supervise contact between any animal and young children. If supervision is not possible, parents may wish to consider getting a ferret at a later date. Children should never be left alone with a ferret or any other pet that can potentially injure them.

#### **Veterinary Care and Vaccinations**

Ferrets should receive routine health examinations from a veterinarian. Your veterinarian can provide you with information on prevention health care, including appropriate vaccinations.

#### **The Ferret Law**

To view 1994, Public Act 358 (The Ferret Law), go to: [www.legislature.mi.gov](http://www.legislature.mi.gov), click on "Public Act MCL Search," enter "358" in the box next to "Public Act Number" and "1994" in the box next to "Public Act Year," and click "Search."



Department of  
**Agriculture**

## **FERRET HEALTH ADVISORY SHEET**

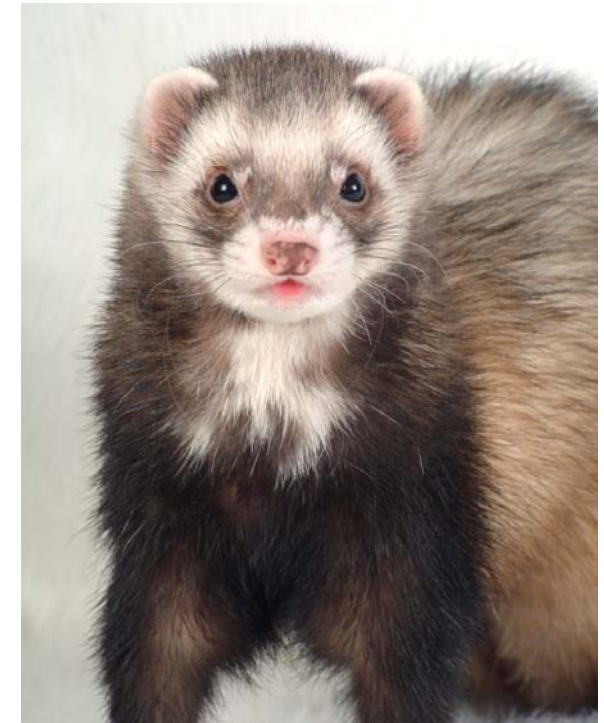


photo courtesy of Photos with Flair

### **INFORMATION FOR FERRET OWNERS**

(pursuant to 1994, Public Act 358)

A copy of this Advisory Sheet must accompany every ferret every time they are sold or transferred within Michigan

Animal Industry Division

[www.michigan.gov/mda](http://www.michigan.gov/mda)

517-373-1077

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