



## Canine Distemper Fact Sheet

### Transmission of the Distemper Virus

The canine distemper virus is mainly spread through bodily secretions and excretions such as urine and faeces. An infected animal can also shed the virus through exhalation implying that the virus *can* be transmitted via air. Younger animals are more vulnerable to canine distemper than older ones because of their under developed immune systems.

### Signs and Symptoms of Canine Distemper in Ferrets

- \* Discharge from eyes - generally foul smelling, yellow or green
- \* Swelling, rashes and thick brown crusts on the chin, lips, and nose
- \* Severe lethargy
- \* High fever
- \* Loss of appetite
- \* Drooling
- \* Dehydration
- \* Coughing
- \* Hardened, thick paw pads and swollen feet
- \* Crusting and redness in the abdominal and anal areas
- \* Muscular tremors
- \* Seizures
- \* Vomiting and diarrhoea may occur, but are less common than in dogs with distemper
- \* Coma

You may only notice a few of these symptoms, as they occur at different points during the progression of the disease. For example, thickening of the paw pads tends to happen in the later stages.

### Diagnosis of Canine Distemper

Aside from signs and symptoms, laboratory diagnostic examinations such as blood tests are recommended to detect and confirm the disease and its severity. Actual viral isolation and identification is also possible depending on the capacity of a laboratory.

### Prevention of Canine Distemper

Canine distemper is common in unvaccinated dog populations and is known to be present in the Midlands at this time. Vaccination of ferrets who are taken out in public is recommended (one dog vial will vaccinate two ferrets). Booster shots should be administered every 12-18 months to ensure and maintain the antibodies against the virus.

Basic proper hygiene and sanitation such as the use of standard disinfectants is sufficient to kill the virus, obviously hand washing etc when moving between groups is just common sense. Infected animals **must** also be quarantined from other animals.



## Treatment of Canine Distemper

Similar with other viral diseases there is no direct treatment for canine distemper. Early detection of the disease is important to increase the chances of containing an outbreak. Once a ferret has been infected, the owner can only offer supportive treatment and hope for the best. Recovery is rare as the disease is usually fatal.

Sometimes individuals rally but a relapse frequently occurs from which recovery is unlikely.

Sources: <http://www.caninedistemper.org/>, <http://www.ferretsforum.co.uk/> and veterinary advice.