

Quarantine! Precautions to Take when Adding a New Ferret to Your Business

A group of ferrets is known as a “business.” There is great excitement in bringing a new ferret home to add to your business! Visions of ferrets, happily playing and snuggling, fill your mind. Plans for the safety of your existing ferrets as well as the new arrival must be considered though. The quarantine of a new addition should be a priority above all others.



Whether acquired from a breeder, shelter or pet store, new ferrets should be quarantined for at least two weeks. This essential practice will diminish the possibility of the transfer of bacterial infections, viral diseases and parasites. The time allows the new ferret to adjust to unfamiliar surroundings, lower its stress level and bond with you prior to meeting his new friends. And, most importantly, these weeks of separation give ample time to take the ferret to the vet to check for infectious diseases and vaccinate against some of them.

Take a New Ferret to the Veterinarian

The visit to the vet should include vaccinations, if recommended (see the American Ferret Association Vaccination protocol - <http://www.ferret.org/read/vaccinations.html>). A test for Aleutian Disease Virus (ADV) should be performed. ADV is an infectious disease that is preventable. Learn more about ADV, testing and ways to prevent it at - <http://www.ferret.org/read/aleutianarticle.html>.

During your visit to the vet, the new ferret should also be checked for external parasites such as fleas and ear mites. These can be safely treated before any chance of spreading to the existing business. The vet should also test for internal parasites by performing a fecal analysis so you can follow through with any needed treatment before introduction to the other ferrets at home. You may wish to have the ferret spayed or neutered if it is healthy and has not been altered yet. Lastly, if not already micro chipped, this is an important consideration should the ferret become lost. A note about micro chipping: make sure your ferrets are properly registered under your name with the chip company. It is not uncommon for a ferret to go unregistered as the vet or breeder only inserts the chip while it is the responsibility of the pet owner to register the chip in their name.

Housing & Care of the Ferret During Quarantine

A new ferret to the household should be housed in his own cage in a separate room for at least two weeks. Some breeders and shelters extend that time and even house new animals in another space altogether. Paula Woodland, AFA show judge, says, "I operate both a ferret rescue, Ferret Haven and a ferretry, WWW Ferretry. Since I have over 50 ferrets in my house, I am always cautious when bringing new ferrets into the shelter. I don't want to risk getting my personal pets and the shelter kids sick! I always

quarantine incoming ferrets for 2 weeks, longer if they are sick. My quarantine area is separate from my house and I handle all quarantined ferrets infrequently to keep cross contamination to a minimum. I wash my hands and change my clothes after handling the quarantine kids so that I won't run too much risk on making the ferrets in my house sick. All ferrets get tested for ADV before coming into my house too. Quarantining the ferrets won't stop ECE coming into the shelter since ferrets can be carriers, but it will weed out many life threatening illnesses such as canine distemper and the flu. It's really tempting to bring a cute little fuzzy into your loving home as soon as possible, I know. I do recommend that you protect your current pets as much as possible. Quarantine at a friend's house if possible and take the newbie to the vet for a checkup. I've heard so many horror stories and hope that everyone can keep their kids as safe as possible while helping others!"

During the quarantine period, new ferrets should be carefully monitored. If there are signs of illness it should be addressed immediately. The above described vet visit should be scheduled for as early as possible. A big concern is the spread of Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis (ECE), a disease with the symptoms of lack of appetite, green stools, lethargy and vomiting. Unfortunately, there may not be signs of ECE in a new arrival but ferrets who have suffered from ECE will remain susceptible to episodes of the disease. And, the ferret can remain a carrier of ECE for up to six or eight months after initial diagnosis. There is no way to test for ECE like there is for ADV. ADD link for ECE articles on AFA web page.

Introducing New Ferrets

Once the quarantine period has safely passed, the new ferret can be introduced to his new pals! This can be exciting but also aggravating, depending on how they all interact. Patience is critical as there may be rough play that even seems violent. Loud vocalizations and hissing may occur. There may also be territorial behavior such as peeing and pooping and stashing of favorite toys. Allowing the new ferret to return to his quarantine space and cage for breaks during this process is a good idea as hopefully they have become secure in that spot. Alternatively, some ferrets will immediately take to one another and be friends. Regardless, new ferrets should not be left alone with existing ferrets at first, even if they appear to get along. Slowly integrate the ferrets for longer periods of time while you are at home and can be aware of any problems that arise. Closely monitor play and signs of health problems such as ear mites or disease for the first few weeks. Before you know it, the "new" ferret will no longer be new and will become part of the household!

Visit the American Ferret Association to learn all about ferret care, foods & more!

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