



## CARING FOR YOUR FERRET

### ABOUT FERRETS

The domestic ferret (*Mustela putorius furo*) is a small furry mammal in the weasel (Mustelidae) family. Ferrets are not rodents. Ferrets, by nature, are inquisitive, funny, and energetic animals.

### HABITAT

Your ferret's habitat should include:

- Wire enclosure with a safety lock – large enough for a ferret to play in, with size appropriate wire spacing to prevent escape. Enclosures with multi-levels are highly recommended.
- High back litter pan – ferrets like to back into corners before they eliminate waste.
- Dust-free/Biodegradable Litter – safe and natural for ferrets and disposable.
- Substrate – different than what is being used in the litterbox to cover the habitat floor.
- Water bottle – your ferret needs a fresh water supply every day.
- Food bowl – ferrets are free-feeding animals, so it is important to always have fresh food available.
- Sleeping hammock, tube, or sack – ferrets require more sleep than many other pets due to their fast metabolism, so it's necessary for them to have a safe and cozy environment for sleeping.
- Toys – ferrets are extremely curious animals that need lots of toys to remain mentally stimulated.

Never use food preparation areas to clean small animal habitats or anything in their habitats. If you clean the habitat in the bathroom, disinfect the area completely afterwards.

### WATER AND FOOD

Ferrets are obligate carnivores and need a nutritionally complete diet high in meat protein. Fruits and vegetables should not be offered to ferrets. Your ferret should always have fresh food and water available. Juvenile ferrets should access to wet food to help prevent rectal prolapse.

Treats should be fed in moderation, not to exceed 10% of your ferret's diet, and should not be used as a diet substitute. Avoid treats with dairy or sugar.

## GROOMING

Ferrets are clean animals and groom themselves. When ferrets shed, however, they tend to get hairballs, so it is important to have a malt-based laxative on hand, such as Ferret Lax, to alleviate this problem. A soft-bristled brush can be used to brush your ferret to remove loose hair and increase bonding with your pet. A conditioning spray can be used to help improve your ferret's skin and coat. Ferrets need their nails clipped at least monthly, so always make sure you have styptic powder on hand in case you accidentally hit their quick. Clean your ferret's outer ears using cotton balls and ear cleaner.

## KEEPING YOUR FERRET HEALTHY

Your ferret should have its first distemper vaccination when they are between 7 to 9 weeks old; verify this with your pet store. We recommend that your pet receives the full series of 3 distemper vaccinations, which should be administered 3-4 weeks apart. Your ferret should be revaccinated annually. Ferrets should also receive a rabies vaccination between 12-16 weeks of age, depending on your state's regulations, and then annually.

Ferrets are very curious animals and love to explore their surroundings, so be sure to supervise your ferret whenever he/she is out of its enclosure and around small children.

Ferrets are prone to chew things, especially rubber, which is not digestible and therefore very dangerous. Make sure you provide safe chewing toys and remove any latex, rubber, or soft plastic from their play areas. Keep electrical cords out of reach.

Provide interactive toys such as tunnels, tubes, and hard plastic balls to encourage physical activity.

Ferrets should be secured with a leash, harness, or in a pet-safe carrier when they are out of your house.

Arrange a visit to the veterinarian as soon as possible after picking up your new ferret. The veterinarian will make sure your new pet is healthy and can answer any questions you might have.

## AVOIDING HUMAN ILLNESS

Although ferrets may carry diseases, such as the common cold or flu including H1N1 that can be transmitted to humans, it is much more likely the ferret will contract these illnesses from their owners, so never handle your ferret if you are unwell.

These simple precautions can help prevent the risk of illness or infections:

- Closely supervise children and make sure they wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before and after handling small animals, their habitats or anything in their habitats.
- As cute and cuddly as they are, do not kiss small animals. Illnesses are sometimes spread this way.
- Never use food preparation areas to clean small animal habitats or anything in their habitats. If you clean the habitat in the bathroom, disinfect the area completely afterwards. Clean the habitat, food, and water bowls in a well-ventilated area.

*Children younger than 5 years old, people with weakened immune systems, and people 65 years of age and older are more likely to get diseases spread between animals and people (also known as zoonotic diseases); contact your health care provider for more information.*

*This information is designed as a basic guide. There are several books and online resources available which provide in-depth information on ferrets and their care. Contact your veterinarian for additional information.*