



COMMON FERRET PATHOGENS

ADRENAL GLAND DISEASE

Adrenal Gland Disease is a common disease affecting neutered ferrets and is typically seen in middle aged to older ferrets, the average time of onset being 3 1/2 years after neutering. It is characterized by hair loss in both sexes and by vulval enlargement in female ferrets. Diagnosis of adrenocortical disease in ferrets differs from the classic Cushing's disease in dogs, as serum cortisol concentrations are not elevated in ferrets, as such Cortisol tests in ferrets are not diagnostic. Therefore tests for Oestrodial, 17-OH Progesterone and Androstenedione should be performed and if one or more of these show elevation, there is a high probability of adrenal disease. These tests can be performed using a serum sample (not a gel tube).

INSULINOMA

Insulinomas are tumours of the pancreatic beta cells and are one of the most common tumours occurring in middle aged to older ferrets. These tumours produce an excessive amount of insulin, resulting in hypoglycaemia. Insulinomas are usually seen in ferrets between the ages of 3 and 8 years, both sexes are affected. Clinical signs include acute collapsing episodes, during this time the ferret is depressed, minimally responsive and recumbent. Also increased salivation and 'glazed' eyes may be seen. Another common presentation involves a gradual onset of weakness or lethargy over weeks to months, the appetite can be normal or decreased and weight loss may often be seen. Some ferrets may show no clinical signs and in these animals, insulinoma is usually diagnosed during surgery for other problems.

ALEUTIAN DISEASE

Blood glucose concentrations of $<3.4\text{mmol/l}$ after food has been withheld for 4 hours are considered diagnostic in animals with clinical signs. Serum insulin levels can be measured. They are usually increased but can be within the reference range.

Aleutian disease is caused by a parvovirus. It typically manifests itself as a wasting disease and weight loss, lethargy, hepatomegaly, pallor, melaena, splenomegaly, rear leg or general weakness and neurological behaviour are all possible signs. Infected animals can serve as a potential source of infection for other ferrets. There is no vaccine available for this disease. A diagnosis can be made either from a positive antibody titre using serum or hypergammaglobulinaemia shown on a serum protein electrophoresis graph.

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COCCIDIOSIS

Coccidiosis can occur in all ages of ferrets, but particularly in young animals. Infection is commonly subclinical, but they may have bloody diarrhoea and be dehydrated. The *Isospora* species that infects ferrets may cross infect cats and dogs, so all animals in a multiple pet household should be checked.



Diagnosis of coccidiosis can be based on a demonstration of oocysts in faecal flotations.

GIARDIA

Giardia is occasionally seen in ferrets and usually occurs after exposure to infected dogs or cats.

Diagnosis of Giardia can be based on a demonstration of cysts in a faecal flotation.



CRYPTOSPORIDIUM

Cryptosporidium can occur in all ages of ferrets, but particularly in young animals. It is usually subclinical in both immunocompetent and immunosuppressed animals and can persist for several weeks. Most immunocompetent animals recover from the infection within 2-3 weeks but in immunosuppressed animals, infection can last for months. This is a zoonotic disease and can be especially harmful to immunocompromised human individuals.

Diagnosis of Cryptosporidium is via special staining on faecal samples.

Campylobacter, Salmonella, Leptospirosis, Listeriosis and Rabies are also potential zoonotic diseases that can be seen in ferrets.



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