

Fact Sheet

Ferretting Out Heartworm Prevention

Not just dogs and cats

Ferrets are popular pocket pets that need to be seen by a veterinarian regularly, just like dogs and cats. And like dogs and cats, ferrets can become infected with heartworms. It only takes one mosquito bite for a ferret to contract this dangerous — and sometimes fatal — disease.

The signs of disease

The signs of heartworm disease in ferrets are similar to those in dogs, but they develop more rapidly because the ferret's heart is quite small. While dogs may not show symptoms until they have many worms infecting their hearts, lungs and blood vessels, just one worm can cause serious respiratory distress in a ferret. Symptoms of this distress include

- Lethargy (i.e., fatigue, tiredness)
- Open-mouth and/or rapid breathing
- Pale blue or muddy gum color
- Coughing



Prevent so you don't have to treat

While heartworm disease in ferrets can be treated, the treatment regime is particularly hard on them and often unsuccessful. Preventing heartworm is less expensive and much safer than treating it — just as it is for other pets. A veterinarian must prescribe heartworm medication for ferrets. As an added bonus, some preventives also work against other pests that can affect ferrets, such as fleas and intestinal parasites.

Ferrets are extremely susceptible to heartworm disease and are at risk for the disease even if they are indoor pets. The American Heartworm Society recommends year-round prevention for ferrets as well as regular checkups with a veterinarian to ensure they stay healthy and heartworm-free.

Special thanks to Jaclyn Bruce, DVM, Marathon Veterinary Hospital, Marathon, Florida, for her help in preparing this fact sheet.