

Aleutian Disease

Information for the Ferret Owner

Basic Information

Aleutian Disease (AD) is a viral disease of minks that has a low mortality in ferrets. In one study, 50 ferrets out of 500 tested positive for AD but only two went on and developed clinical signs.

Signs/Symptoms

Symptoms include weight loss, lethargy, enlarged liver and/or spleen, tarry stool, rear leg weakness, and neurologic signs. From this list you can see that these symptoms are the same as more common ferret diseases such as insulinoma and Helicobacter gastro-intestinal infections.

More specific laboratory findings include an increase in a type of blood protein called gammaglobulins and a positive AD antibody test.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for ferrets with AD. Supportive and nursing care are indicated. There is also no vaccine against the disease. In mink, vaccine studies have failed and actually caused the disease to be worse in some cases.

The virus seems to stay in the body of an infected ferret for a long period of time and that ferret can be a carrier to the rest of the ferrets in the household.

The AD virus in mink seems to be spread by saliva, urine and blood. So good hygiene plays an important part in limiting the disease spread. It is still unknown if airborne spread occurs to any large degree.



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