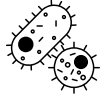


The following is general information for those involved in the care and use of laboratory ferrets. Contact [occupational.health@cuanschutz.edu](mailto:occupational.health@cuanschutz.edu) if you have any questions.

## **POTENTIAL ZONOTIC DISEASES**



Injuries from working with laboratory ferrets can be sustained from a bite or a scratch. While ferrets may carry organisms that are potentially infectious to humans, the major health risk of working with laboratory ferrets is the development of an allergy.

The development of disease in human hosts often requires an immune-compromising preexisting condition.

### **Potential ferret zoonoses**

#### **Listeriosis**

- Bacterial infection
- Spread through direct contact or aerosolized droplets
- Symptoms
  - Sudden onset diarrhea, nausea, abdominal pain, and low-grade fever
- Can have effects on fetal health if exposed during pregnancy
- Treated with antibiotics

#### **Campylobacteriosis**

- Infection with gram-negative bacterium
- Thought to occur by fecal-oral route through contaminated food or water, or direct contact with infected fecal material
- Symptoms
  - Acute gastrointestinal illness
    - Diarrhea with or without blood
  - Abdominal pain
  - Fever
  - Pseudo-appendicitis
  - Rare: septicemia and arthritis
- Usually brief and can be treated with antibiotics

### **Potential reverse zoonoses**

#### **Influenza**

- Contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses
- Spreads through droplets (coughing, sneezing, talking) or through touching surfaces with flu virus on it then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes
- Symptoms
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Sore throat
  - Runny or stuffy nose
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headache
  - Fatigue
- Severity may be lessened by getting an annual flu shot

#### **COVID-19**

- Viral infection spread through respiratory droplets
- Symptoms
  - Sore throat
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
  - Fever
  - Headache
  - Chills or body aches
  - Fatigue
  - Loss of taste or smell
- Severity may be lessened by getting COVID-19 primary series and staying up-to-date with booster shots
- Can have effects on fetal health if infection occurs during pregnancy

## **ALLERGIC REACTIONS TO FERRETS**



The greatest occupational risk to working with ferrets is allergic reaction or developing allergies.

- Those with other allergies at greater risk
- Dander, hair, scales, fur, saliva, and body waste (urine in particular) contain powerful allergens
  - Cause both skin disorders and respiratory symptoms
- Primary symptoms
  - Nasal or eye symptoms
  - Skin disorders
  - Asthma

## **HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF**



### **Wash your hands**

- Single most effective preventative measure
- Regular, thorough hand washing
- Wash hands and arms after handling any animal
- Never drink or eat in the animals rooms or before washing your hands

### **Wear gloves**

- When working with ferrets, wear appropriate gloves for the task
- Wash your hands after removing gloves

### **Wear respiratory protection**

- Respiratory protection should be worn when there is risk of aerosol transmission of zoonotic agents
- Respiratory protection should be worn when there is a medical history or symptoms of allergies
- Initial Medical Evaluation for respiratory clearance is performed through Occupational Health
  - Fit testing is performed through Industrial Hygiene once clearance is complete through Occupational Health

### **Wear other protective clothing**

- Disposable gowns are required to be worn in the vivarium
- Consider changing clothing before leaving work. Place dirty clothing in a bag and launder clothes at home before wearing again.

### **Follow proper exposure reporting protocols**

- If you are injured on the job, promptly report the incident to your supervisor
  - Immediately call Occupational Health (303) 724-9145
  - File a claim with University Risk Management
    - <https://www.cu.edu/risk/file-claim>
- Minor cuts and abrasions should be immediately cleansed with antibacterial soap
  - Protect injuries from exposure

### **Tell your physician you work with ferrets**

- Whenever you are ill, mention to your physician that you work with ferrets
- Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms

**For more information, refer to the Occupational Health website**  
**<https://research.cuanschutz.edu/ehs/home/divisions/occupational-health>**



**or contact Occupational Health at**  
**[occupational.health@cuanschutz.edu](mailto:occupational.health@cuanschutz.edu)**