

## Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis

ECE is a virus that is also known as “The Green Slime Disease” and is a highly contagious disease for which there is no vaccine or medication. It first appeared around 1993 and has been spreading across the USA. Symptoms can range from diarrhea, to vomiting, dehydration and starvation. This is not a necessarily fatal disease for a healthy ferret, as long as steps are taken to intervene. The information provided here is simply a guide and is not meant to replace your vet, if you notice a problem, take the ferret in to the vet for an exam.

This disease is primarily transmitted through contact with bodily fluids or just by simply holding an infected ferret and then touching another. It is difficult to not cross-contaminate in a multi-ferret household, but constant washing of the hands, using a parvocide when cleaning cages, and not washing the infected ferret's bedding along with the others, may help to lessen the exposure. A good rule of thumb is not to handle the kits in the pet store (no matter how cute they are) or to handle ferrets of people you do not know.

One of the most obvious symptoms of the disease, as mentioned above, is diarrhea. Not all ferrets who have diarrhea or a green stool have ECE. Green stools simply indicate intestinal distress and seeing an occasional green stool is not a red flag but it does become serious if a series of trips to the litterbox yields a lot of green poo. A normal stool is usually brown in color, firm and smooth. As disgusting as it may seem, keep an eye on their litterbox; your ferret's poo tells you when something is wrong when it comes out looking abnormal. Along with the loose (sometimes projectile) green stool, you may notice stringy mucous, a “birdseed-like” appearance, and can be a bit foamy. One of the worst parts of this nasty disease is the dehydration caused by the diarrhea. Your ferret will die of dehydration long before it dies of starvation. You **must** make sure your ferret is hydrated. If it is not, it will not want to eat, causing even greater problems. You can check your ferret for dehydration by gently pinching the scruff of their neck. If it springs back, it is hydrated. If it stays up, you have a serious problem, which you must take care of immediately. Pedialyte is a good electrolyte replacement and plain water will work as well. Some advocate the use of Immodium AD to help control the diarrhea.

Another problem ECE causes is ulcers. Just as in humans, ulcers make eating very unpleasant. It has been widely reported that the use of Pepcid A/C and Carafate a half hour before feeding helps to lessen the acid produced by the intestinal upset. Again, you must make sure your ferret is eating. If it is not eating solid food, Gerber's Chicken or Turkey Babyfood, slightly warmed is a good alternative until it is eating kibble again. Some people can get their ferrets to eat Hill's Prescription Diet a/d, although most ferrets won't. Another alternative to kibble is duck soup or Bob Church's Chicken Gravy. Even grinding their kibble (a coffee bean grinder works great) and adding vanilla Boost or heavy whipping cream is a good alternative.

Ferrets can be very stubborn. You **MUST** make your ferret drink and eat. If you do not win this battle, your ferret will not win either. You can get a needle-less syringe (check with your local shelter, pharmacy or vet) and force feed/water your ferret. This is done by gently scruffing your ferret and placing the syringe in the side of the mouth and gently squeezing the food/water into it's mouth. Be very careful as the liquid must go down the throat, not the windpipe. You must feed your ferret **at least** 20cc three times a day, four is preferred or more if it is eating small amounts.

Carafate can be obtained from your vet; Pepcid A/C and Immodium AD can be bought over the counter at your local pharmacy. Pepcid A/C comes tablet form and the suspension is one tablet dissolved in 10cc of water. The dosage is .5cc twice a day for the Pepcid and for the Immodium (liquid) it is .1cc twice a day for two days, then skip a day and then one to two more days at the same dosage. **Please note:** Tylenol, ibuprofen and aspirin are **toxic** to ferrets. **Read the labels of all medications before giving them to your ferrets.**

Last, your ferret needs to be kept warm. A ferret that is cold has a slow metabolism and will lose its interest in eating. You can buy a heating pad made especially for pets. Just like their human owners, ferrets need support and comfort when they are sick and a little TLC and understanding go a long way to make them feel better.

HOFA members are available to answer any questions you may have, please feel free us at: [hofapres@yahoo.com](mailto:hofapres@yahoo.com)

Please visit HOFA on the web at: [www.hofa-rescue.org](http://www.hofa-rescue.org)