

Outdoor Hazards for Ferrets

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be aware of **outdoor hazards**

Taking a walk around your backyard or in a park with your ferrets can be a fun and enriching experience, but it also presents a number of hazards that you need to be aware of if you want to keep your ferrets safe. What are the hazards that the outdoors present for ferrets and what can you do about them?

Disease

Whenever you take your ferret outside, there is a possibility that you will be exposing him to diseases such as canine distemper, rabies, and parasitic infection. To protect your ferret from these conditions follow these guidelines:

- Keep him up-to-date on his canine distemper and rabies vaccinations.
- Make sure the canine distemper vaccine is designed for ferrets!
- Wash his feet when you come inside after a walk.
- Carry antibacterial wipes so you can clean his feet immediately if he steps in another animal's stool or another source of disease.

Fleas & Ticks

Depending on what area of the country you live in, fleas and ticks may be a problem year round. During the season or seasons when fleas and ticks are present, use a flea and tick preventive or spray approved for ferrets, or ask your veterinarian which product to use before going for a walk. If using a spray, use a tissue or paper towel to make sure you get the areas around your ferret's ears and under his chin.

Heartworm

Ferrets' hearts are very small, and a single heartworm can kill them. If you live in an area where heartworm is a problem (your veterinarian will be able to tell you this), then you need to use a heartworm preventive regardless of whether or not your ferret goes outside. The use of heartworm preventives in ferrets is off label, so speak to your veterinarian about which product to use and the dosage.

Predators

Predators can include dogs, cats, wild animals, and birds of prey. Always be on guard when taking your ferret outside, and pick your ferret up if any possible predators approach you.

Heatstroke

Ferrets are very susceptible to heatstroke, and any temperatures over 80°F can be dangerous. To prevent heatstroke, never take your ferret out when it is warmer than 78°F and always bring water and a carrier or some other shelter to provide an escape from the sun and heat.

Escape

Escape is a very real danger. Many ferret owners have lost their ferrets because they thought they could catch them if they decided to run. The truth is that ferrets can be very fast, especially if startled, so you should never take your ferret outside without using a harness and lead. If you plan on staying in one area, you can also bring a playpen for your ferret to play in. This will give him room to explore but will keep him safe. Use a playpen cover to protect him from predators. Regardless of how your ferret is restrained, you should always supervise him when he is outside - never leave him alone. If you go inside, he goes inside, even if you're only going to be in there for a minute or two.

Injury

Aside from attack by a predator, the most likely injury that your ferret could suffer is from other people. Because they are so small, ferrets can easily get stepped on or kicked by a person who isn't aware that they are there. Pick up your ferret and carry him whenever you are in heavy traffic areas, including sidewalks, crosswalks, and any other areas where a lot of people are walking near you.

Fertilizers and Weed Killers

Because ferrets are going to spend most of their time wandering around in the grass, the possibility that they will come in contact with toxic chemicals from fertilizers and weed killers is fairly high. The best way to protect your ferret from this hazard is to keep him in your own yard or take him to public park areas where they must post if they have used fertilizers.

Remember, walks are a great way to provide enrichment for your ferret, but safety should always come first! By following the tips above, you can keep your ferret happy and healthy.

