

WINTER SAFETY: Hypothermia in Ferrets

Ferrets are fur-bearing mammals. Ferrets can handle the cooler temperatures than warm weather. Even so if your ferret is usually housed indoors, their undercoats will be thinner in Winter, than those of ferrets that live outdoors.

Although your pet ferrets may be fun to watch play in the snow, they must be protected from over exposure to the cold: “hypothermia”

Hypothermia is abnormally low body temperature. Hypothermia occurs when your ferret rapidly loses body temperature due to the sudden and extreme cold:

Signs of hypothermia:

- Redness of the extremities (paws, nose, tail and ears) = “frostbite”*
- Whitened skin and discomfort
- Weakness
- Shivering
- Muscle Stiffness
- Low heart and respiratory rates and difficulty breathing
- Fixed and dilated pupils, stupor, coma

If you notice any discoloration of your ferret’s skin or limbs, bring your ferret to the veterinarian IMMEDIATELY.

* Frostbite: What are the clinical signs?

“Frostbite” is caused by injury to the skin due to cold temperatures.

As frostbitten tissues thaw, they may become red and very painful due to inflammation.

In animals changes due to frostbite can take days to appear, especially if the affected area is small or on non-weight bearing areas, such as the tip of the tail or ears.

Clinical signs of “frostbite:”

- discoloration of the affected area of skin, which is often pale, gray, or bluish.
- coldness and/or brittleness of the area when touched.
- pain when you touch the body part(s).
- swelling of the affected area(s).
- blisters or skin ulcers.
- areas of blackened or dead skin.

Severely frostbitten areas will become necrotic or die. As the tissue starts to die, it changes to a dark blue to black color; then, over a period of several days to weeks, it sloughs or falls off. During this time, pus may form or the tissue may develop a foul smell, due to secondary bacterial infection.

Indoor Ferrets

In the United States and Canada, most ferrets are kept indoors. If so, their fur will not reach the thickness needed to protect them from cold temperatures (less than 50 degrees F/ 10 degrees C).

How long can my ferret play outside in the Winter?

Limit your ferret's exposure to cold winter temperatures and snow to not more than 10 to 15 minutes, although smaller ferrets may be less tolerant to the cold.

DO monitor your ferret closely for signs of shivering, and bring her inside.

DO NOT expose your ferret to freezing and subfreezing temperatures.



Outdoor Ferrets

Keeping domestic ferrets outdoors is NOT recommended for a variety of reasons. When kept outdoors, they must first become accustomed to the environmental temperatures over months.

Even so, all animals must be kept in secure enclosures (sheds, etc.) from which they cannot escape. They must be protected from wind, rain, and cold temperatures, and in the summertime from sun and heat. In such cases, ferrets must have warm bedding and are generally housed together for warmth. Water and food must be checked frequently, to avoid freezing and insect infestation.



For more reading:

Hypothermia: [Hypothermia in Small Mammals](#) (PetPlace)

Winter Safety: <https://www.pets4homes.co.uk/pet-advice/how-to-keep-ferrets-safe-in-winter.html>

Frostbite: <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/frostbite-in-dogs>