

## Rabbit Health

Most potential health problems can be avoided or treated if caught early. If you think your rabbits are showing any of these symptoms, it's critical that you seek veterinary advice immediately. Remember - it's your legal duty to protect your rabbits from pain, suffering, injury and disease. It is worth considering getting your rabbits insured - just in case they ever do need medical treatment - as the cost can soon add up! We would also recommend getting your rabbits micro-chipped - just in case they ever make an escape attempt!

### Flystrike

Flystrike is a common, extremely distressing and often fatal disease which predominantly occurs in warm weather. It's caused when rabbits develop a sore area, usually around the rear end or as a result of faecal and/or urine soiling. This attracts flies which lay eggs in the sores or on the soiled fur. These eggs then hatch into maggots that eat away at the tissues in the surrounding area. The problem, if left untreated, can get so bad that the maggots reach the rabbit's abdomen, causing so much suffering that the rabbit has to be put to sleep. If you spot any signs of flystrike on your pet, such as eggs or maggots, seek urgent veterinary advice. You can prevent flystrike by:

- Keeping housing clean and dry.
- Feeding the correct high fibre diet to avoid diarrhoea.
- Checking your pet thoroughly for signs of illness, injury or abnormal behaviour every day, and in warm weather checking the fur and skin around your pets' rear end and tail area, at least twice a day.
- Removing any wet or soiled bedding every day.
- Keeping rabbits active and healthy - obese rabbits may be too big to clean themselves effectively or to eat their caecotrophs (which then build up around their rear end).
- Using suitable insecticides and insect repellents.

### Fleas

The fleas most commonly found on domestic rabbits are the same species of flea as will most likely be affecting all other pets, and you, in the household. Rabbits' symptoms can be varied, from itching to severe scratching of the neck and biting of the area around the base of the tail. Treatment should focus on an animal and environmental approach so as to minimise the level and persistence of infestation.

### Lice

The incidence of lice infestation in rabbits is low however, if your vet believes that the risk to your rabbits is high, lice can be prevented with treatments similar to those for fleas and flies. Similarly, treatment of the environment with an approved rabbit-safe environmental insecticide would also minimise the level and persistence of infestation.

**Encephalitozoon cuniculi (E.cuniculi)**

E. cuniculi is a parasite of rabbits which can cause paralysis, tremors, kidney and eye diseases, and ultimately death. However not all rabbits show signs of illness; they can appear healthy whilst passing E. cuniculi spores onto other rabbits through contaminated urine, so it is important to prevent urine contamination of food and water. Medicinal treatment can be given to both prevent and treat this disease. Speak to your vet for more details.

**Myxomatosis**

Myxomatosis is caused by a virus spread by biting insects (like fleas and mosquitos). The first signs of infection are puffy, fluid-filled swellings around the head and face. Within a day or so, these swellings can become so severe that they can cause blindness. 'Sleepy eyes' are another classic sign, along with swollen lips, tiny swellings on the inside of the ear and puffy swellings around the anus and genitals. Eating and drinking becomes progressively more difficult and death usually follows within twelve days. All breeds and types of rabbit can be affected, including house rabbits. Regular vaccination can prevent your rabbits from getting this potentially fatal disease. Speak to your vet for advice.

**Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)**

VHD is a very serious condition which causes internal bleeding and shut down of internal organs. It is spread by direct contact between rabbits (both wild and domesticated) and indirect contact, such as via fleas on people, clothing, shoes and other objects. Regular flea and fly control measures and avoiding pet rabbits coming into contact with areas wild rabbits have been, can help to minimise the risk of infection. You can prevent VHD with vaccinations. Speak to your vet for more information.