

# Flystrike In Rabbits



During the summer months your rabbit is at an increased risk of having Flystrike. This is caused by flies which lay their eggs on your rabbit usually in the hindquarters area. These eggs then hatch into maggots in as little as 12 hours, burrowing into your rabbit's skin and eating it away. This causes extensive external and internal wounds. The fly season generally runs from April to October so your rabbit could potentially be at risk most of the year. High risk rabbits are those that suffer from obesity, dental disease, diarrhoea, arthritis and those kept in dirty hutches that attract flies. It is always important to check your rabbit daily but during the summer they should be checked at least twice a day. If Flystrike is not treated early enough it can be **fatal**.

## Prevention of Flystrike

We recommend that you check your rabbit at least twice a day, paying particular attention to their rear end to make sure it is clean and dry.

Feed your rabbit a regular balanced diet to help prevent diarrhoea.

Regular cleaning of the hutch is essential to make sure that the bedding is dry and insect free.

During the summer months covering your rabbit's hutch with an old net curtain can help stop flies from entering their hutch through the mesh.

Your rabbit can be protected from Flystrike by applying a product available from the veterinary practice. This product contains a growth inhibitor and once applied it will prevent any fly eggs from hatching into maggots. This should be applied from the middle of the back to the rear end including the hind legs making sure that the whole bottle is used each time. This product cannot be used in pregnant or lactating rabbits or applied onto broken skin. Rabbits must be over 10 weeks of age for use and protection lasts for approximately 8-10 weeks.

There is also a germicidal wound spray with insecticide available which repels insects, eliminates maggots and is effective against fleas, flies, mosquitoes, ticks and lice. This product kills any existing eggs and will repel any larvae present which will die within 30 minutes. The spray can be applied to open wounds and is ideal for use in rabbits, guinea pigs and other small rodents. Once sprayed it will last for 7 days.

## Treatment for Flystrike

If you discover maggots on your rabbit, it is essential that you contact your veterinary surgery for emergency treatment. The maggots will be carefully removed and the wound(s) if present will then be cleaned. The damage to the skin and surrounding tissue will need to be assessed. Sedation or anaesthetic may be required depending on the severity of the case. In some cases the damage caused by the maggots is too severe to treat and the only option is euthanasia. However many

rabbits survive and heal well with intensive nursing. This includes antibiotics, analgesia (pain relief) and intravenous fluids.

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## **Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease RHD2**

It has been discovered that there is now a second strain of RHD (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease) RHD2. Rabbits infected with the RHD2 virus typically DO NOT show the symptoms that are common with the original RHD virus so it is far more difficult to diagnose.

Fatality from RHD2 occurs later and over a longer period of time than RHD. Although RHD2 is less virulent than the original strain of RHD, its difficult early diagnosis actually means it is more challenging given rabbits can carry the disease for a longer period of time without any visible signs of infection.

**You must still vaccinate your rabbit against Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) as well.**

This vaccine is not a replacement but in addition to your normal vaccination routine. At present as we are not in a high risk area for RHD2 we are recommending yearly vaccination against the new strain.

If you are concerned about how best to protect your rabbit or have experienced the sudden death of your rabbit and are concerned, please contact us and we will be able to help.

Useful links:

The British Rabbit Council-Advice For Rabbit Owners

The British Rabbit Council- Advice Following Sudden Death