

Myxomatosis In Rabbits

Your rabbit should be protected against two major diseases called Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (both strains). These can be potentially fatal.

Myxomatosis is a widespread disease caused by a virus. All types of rabbit are potentially susceptible, including house rabbits.

The disease is spread by blood-sucking insects such as the rabbit flea and mosquitoes. When an infected insect bites a rabbit, a small amount of the virus is placed in their skin as the insect feeds. Within a few days the virus passes into the rabbit's blood spreading it to several sites. The virus mainly multiplies in the skin around the eyes, nose, face, skin inside their ears and around the anus and genitalia areas. It is best to try and prevent your rabbit from coming into contact with wild rabbits as they tend to carry a lot of fleas and can themselves be infected.

Generally the first sign of infection that you will notice are puffy eyes, lips and ears as well as swellings around their genitalia. Within 24 hours these swellings can become very severe, eating and drinking becomes more difficult and unfortunately death usually occurs within 2 weeks of infection. Some rabbits do survive the disease with intensive nursing but they are usually left with severe scarring and scabs over their body.

There is no specific treatment for Myxomatosis so it is vital that you ensure your rabbit is protected against it.

The most effective way to do this is by flea and insect control and vaccination.

Spot on treatments are available to protect your rabbit against fleas and nets over their hutches will help with mosquito control.

The vaccination against both Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease can be given from 5 weeks of age, with booster vaccinations given annually and it offers the best possible chance of immunity.

Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD)

RHD (also known as Viral Haemorrhagic Disease VHD) is a viral disease which is spread between rabbits by direct contact but also by indirect contact via people, clothing, on shoes, other objects and fleas.

All types of rabbit are potentially susceptible, including house rabbits.

The signs are usually

- depression
- collapse
- difficulty in breathing

- convulsions (fits)
- bleeding from the nose
- sudden unexplained death

As with Myxomatosis there is no specific treatment for RHD so it is essential that you vaccinate your rabbit against it.

The vaccination against both Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease and Myxomatosis is given from 5 weeks of age with a yearly booster.

A second strain of RHD has also been discovered, called 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.

Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease RHD2

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Useful links:

The British Rabbit Council-Advice For Rabbit Owners

The British Rabbit Council- Advice Following Sudden Death

Vaccinating Your Rabbit

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Myxomatosis

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Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD)

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For more information please read 'Common Diseases Of Rabbits.'