



Your independent family vet. Always.

How can the diseases be controlled?

There are several important considerations which need to be addressed to achieve optimal control.

- ✓ Reduction of risk through control of insect parasites (especially in the case of myxomatosis) and avoiding sources of infection.
- ✓ Vaccination. While vaccinated rabbits can occasionally catch these diseases, their prognosis is greatly improved if they've received the vaccine.

Insect control

Myxomatosis is commonly spread via blood-sucking insects and, in this respect, flea control is especially vital.

Keep wild rabbits away from pets and use flea control methods such as spot-ons and sprays. Mosquito and fly control is more difficult but insect repellent strips and nets can be used. Dry bedding will also discourage flies.

Vaccination

There is a vaccine available that can be used to vaccinate your rabbit against myxomatosis and the two known strains of RHD (RHD 1 and RHD 2). Rabbits who have previously only had the RHD vaccine can be transferred onto the combined version.

Annual boosters are required. Ask us for more information about vaccination against myxomatosis and RHD.

TPV/2024-07-RABBITVACC-001

thepetvet.co.uk

Your independent family vet. Always.



**The importance
of vaccination for
your rabbit**

thepetvet.co.uk



Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease* (RHD) are two serious (but preventable) infectious diseases of rabbits.

This leaflet provides the answers to some common questions about both of these diseases and gives guidance on how you can help protect your pet.

What are the signs of disease?

Myxomatosis is caused by a virus. The first signs of infection are puffy, fluid-filled swellings around the head and face. '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. Within a few days, these swellings can become so severe that they can cause blindness. Eating and drinking becomes progressively more difficult, and death usually follows within 12 days.

RHD is also caused by a virus, although a different virus to the one causing myxomatosis. Most rabbits affected by RHD will die rapidly without showing obvious clinical signs apart from a short period of dullness and lethargy lasting a few hours. In rabbits which survive longer, the signs can be quite varied, but may include fever and convulsions, progressing rapidly to a terminal coma, with affected animals usually succumbing within 12-36 hours. In a number of cases, a bloody discharge from the nose may be seen just before death.

*Also known as Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)



Is my rabbit at risk?

For both myxomatosis and RHD, all breeds can be affected, including both pet and wild rabbits.

How is the disease spread?

Myxomatosis is most commonly spread by blood-sucking insects, such as the rabbit flea and mosquitoes. The virus can remain alive in the blood of hibernating fleas over the winter. However as this virus can also spread directly between rabbits in close contact, it is not possible to control the spread of disease purely by eliminating blood-sucking insects.

In the case of RHD, the virus is shed in the urine, droppings and respiratory secretions of affected animals and readily spreads to other rabbits either by direct contact, or indirectly, by biting insects or via contaminated clothing, hutches, water and feed containers and other objects.

I have an indoor rabbit. Do they need vaccinating?

It's recommended that indoor rabbits are vaccinated against myxomatosis and RHD as they can indirectly be exposed to these diseases through contamination via our clothing, shoes, parasites eg fleas and their bedding materials.



How long is the incubation period?

For myxomatosis, it can be anything from 5 to 14 days before signs of the disease begin to show. However, in the case of RHD, the incubation period is much shorter, usually from 1 to 3 days.

Another feature of RHD is that the course of the disease is much more rapid, with many rabbits showing no obvious signs of disease before death (other than dullness and lethargy).

What is the treatment?

There is no cure for myxomatosis or RHD. Due to the poor outcomes and the suffering these diseases cause, the kindest option is often to put the rabbit to sleep.

How long do infected rabbits usually survive?

In the case of myxomatosis, some may survive for weeks or, more rarely, months after infection. But in general, a severe infection in a susceptible rabbit will lead to death within 12 days, often associated with respiratory infection.

Very few domestic rabbits survive myxomatosis and those that do suffer a protracted illness. Many rabbits have to be euthanised. With RHD, affected rabbits will usually succumb much more rapidly - usually within 12-36 hours of symptoms.