



Myxomatosis Vaccination for Pet Rabbits



Baby rabbit with Myxomatosis

One of the nastiest diseases that affects both pet and wild rabbits is Myxomatosis. Unfortunately, most rabbit owners are not aware of the potential risk. The virus which causes the disease was first isolated in Uruguay in 1896. The virus was released into Australia in 1950 as a means of controlling wild rabbits. They had multiplied so rapidly that rabbit control became a serious problem. However, the disease spread to Europe, killing rabbits in Great Britain, Belgium, and France.

Myxomatosis is caused by the myxoma virus. In the domestic rabbit myxomatosis is a severe and almost always fatal systemic disease. Clinical signs include swelling around the head, face, ears and anus, a milky ocular discharge, fever, lethargy, depression and anorexia. Skin nodules can be found on the face and body. Death is prolonged and can take up to 14 days.

The virus is transmitted by blood sucking insects such as mosquitoes and rabbit fleas. Rabbits kept outdoors are particularly at risk.

In the last few weeks (August 2007) at the Fairfield Veterinary Centre we have come across several cases of Myxomatosis. The disease was diagnosed in two young wild rabbits found on the fields around Hinckley which were displaying all of the typical symptoms. Consequently, we were forced to put them to sleep in order to stop spreading the disease and to bring an end to their suffering.

Like many other contagious diseases, Myxomatosis can be prevented. To protect pet rabbits from the virus it is recommended to vaccinate twice a year. The disease might be seen in previously vaccinated rabbits however it can happen very rarely. In this case it is a milder form of disease and it is not fatal.

The risk of spreading of the virus increases particularly in the spring-summer time when the populations of biting insects are at their height.

It is essential to provide in that period of time insect-proof screening for outdoor rabbits and flea control.

So don't let this summer become any more miserable by taking the appropriate precautions against Myxomatosis!

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This article is available on the Fairfield Veterinary Centre web site at www.fairfield-vets.co.uk