

What is Myxomatosis?

Myxomatosis is a potentially lethal disease affecting rabbits caused by the myxoma virus of the pox family. It originally came from Australia where it was released deliberately to reduce the massive wild rabbit population which were considered pests. It was transferred, again deliberately, to France and from there spread to the UK. It is common among the wild rabbit population in the UK. Over 90% of wild rabbits contracting Myxomatosis die from the disease.

It is spread by direct contact and by insects. Fluids from an infected rabbit such as discharge from the eyes, nose or lesions on the skin contain the virus and can infect another rabbits through scratches, abrasions or contact with mucus membranes.

Insects including mosquitoes, ticks, mites, lice and fleas can all carry the disease. This means that even if your rabbit doesn't come into contact with other rabbits it is still important to vaccinate. Insect carriers mean the disease can be transmitted over distances and even indoor rabbits are at risk.

Symptoms

The first symptoms are generally discharge from the eyes and swelling around head, ears and sometimes genitals. Within a few days the eyes may be swollen shut. The swelling can make eating, drinking and breathing difficult. Lumps or nodules may also develop. Secondary infections such as pasteurella (snuffles) are common. Death can occur within a few days to several weeks.

Prevention – Vaccination

Rabbits can be vaccinated against Myxomatosis from 6 weeks of age. Rabbits should not be vaccinated while pregnant or ill. After the first vaccination regular boosters are required. Boosters are given either every 6 months. Vaccination does not guarantee that a rabbit will not contract Myxomatosis; there is still a small risk. Vaccinated rabbits contracting Myxomatosis also have a greater chance of recovery.

Prevention – Insects

As insects are the main way Myxomatosis spreads controlling them is an important way to minimise the risk of infection. It is important to treat other household pets such as cats and dogs for fleas. If you have an outbreak of fleas it will also be necessary to treat the house and carpets. Treatment for mites and lice can be recommended by your vets. Hutches and other living accommodation can be treated with anti-mite disinfectants designed specifically for use on animal cages.

**It's important not to use fly sprays around your rabbit or other pets.
IT IS VITAL TO PREVENT SUFFERING THAT YOU CONTACT YOUR VET IF
YOUR RABBIT SHOWS ANY OF THE ABOVE SYMPTOMS**