



Rabbit Welcome and Information Pack

Rabbits are very different from cats & dogs, understanding them will help keep your rabbit happy & healthy

Vaccinations



MYXI/HVD VACCINE

Vaccination Regime:

We advise vaccination against Myxomatosis and Haemorrhagic Viral Disease. We use the new combined Nobivac™ Myxomatosis/HVD vaccine given as a single injection from 5 weeks old. An annual booster is required.

Myxomatosis Virus

This is always present in the wild rabbit population and is spread by fleas and other biting insects. e.g. mosquitoes.

Clinical signs: Swollen eyes, ears, lips, genitalia, pus at the eyes and nose. The swellings become so severe the rabbit cannot see to feed or drink. Treatment is rarely successful so most rabbits are euthanased on humane grounds.

Vaccination Protection: Myxomatosis is more prevalent during the autumn and early winter so for the best protection it is best to vaccinate in May or June if possible,

Parasite Control: Use regular, suitable flea control e.g. Advantage Spot-On. To protect against mosquitoes use insect repellent strips, mosquito nets and keep bedding dry to avoid moist conditions allowing mosquitoes to breed.

Haemorrhagic Viral Disease (HVD)

HVD is spread by contact with faeces from one infected rabbit to another or indirectly on hands or clothes after handling contaminated bedding or an infected rabbit.

It is fatal with a death rate approaching 100%. Death occurs rapidly usually with the rabbit showing no symptoms at all. HVD attacks the liver causing severe bleeding, increased breathing, bleeding from the nose, blue gums/tongue, swollen abdomen, fitting and death. The only prevention strategy is annual vaccination.

TRACER Microchip

We advise permanent identification with TRACER microchip. The chip (the size of a rice grain) is injected under the skin in a quick procedure done during a consult. Vets, RSPCA & rescue centres have scanners to enable quick repatriation.

External Parasites



CHEYLETIELLA 'FUR' MITE

Fleas: Cause significant irritation of the skin and distress, they also spread the Myxomatosis virus.

Ear Mites: Small parasites that live in the ear canals and cause head shaking, scratching and blood in the ear canal.

Cheyletiella Mites: Cause irritation, dandruff and fur loss and can be transmitted to humans causing a mild rash.

Regime for preventing External Parasites:

Advantage Spot-On once a month from 10 weeks old.

Internal Parasites



Preventative Worming Regime – Panacur Oral Paste

Administer daily for 9 days 2 - 4 times a year and at high risk periods, such as when you first acquire your rabbit, prior to mating and when mixing with other rabbits.

It is important to worm your rabbit as they can suffer from parasites such as *E. cuniculi*. This is a microscopic parasite spread by contact with infected urine and is widespread in the UK with over 50% of pet rabbits exposed to it. If left untreated it can cause head tilt, blindness, kidney disease, hind limb weakness, seizures & death. As treatment of *E. cuniculi* is not always successful we recommend preventing infection by worming with Panacur Oral Paste.

Other preventative measures: Avoid collecting fresh greens where there are wild rabbits & rodents, regularly disinfect food and water bowls, avoid tiered hutches (to prevent urine splash) and place hutches where so as to minimise exposure to wild rabbits and rodents.

Grooming and Nail Clipping

Groom your rabbit once a week and check their nails – we can clip your rabbit's nails if they are long, curly or sharp.

Neutering



We advise neutering rabbits unless you plan to breed from them. It is recommended that young rabbits be separated into single sex groups at 16 weeks of age.

Timing for Neutering:

Males – from 5 months of age

Females – from 5 months of age

Castration of bucks: Reduces the likelihood of him developing behavioural problems.

Spaying of does: This dramatically reduces the chance of developing uterine or ovarian cancer later in life.

Dental Care and Nutrition



MISALIGNED INCISORS

A rabbit's diet should be mainly grass or good quality hay to enable normal teeth wear, offer optimal nutrition and a healthy gut. Ensure access to fresh water at all times and feed a handful of fresh vegetables twice a day.

Rabbit's teeth are designed to cope with a poor quality, grass based diet. Their teeth grow constantly throughout their lives with the abrasive grass and hay wearing the teeth down naturally. Rabbit's teeth become overgrown if the diet is low in fibre as they do not wear properly.

Fibre in the diet is also important for a healthy gut. A diet low in fibre can cause excessive gas production, pain, bloat, reduced gut motility and soft faeces to stick around the bottom increasing the risk of fly strike. Avoid multicoloured 'muesli'-like foods as they encourage selective feeding, are high in calories and lead to obesity.

We have our own range of **PREMIUM RABBIT FOOD** which is high in fibre and contains Thyme, Marjoram, Sage, Parsley, Oregano, Basil in an extruded pellet (to prevent selective feeding). Our food is supplied direct to us from a pet food manufacturer based in the UK which ensures it is also very affordable.

Signs of dental disease: not eating, pain, dribbling, weight loss, gut problems, eye problems & tooth root abscesses.

Dental Treatment: Overgrown incisors (front teeth) need regular trimming or can be removed. Overgrown molars (cheek teeth) wear incorrectly and develop sharp spikes that cut the mouth and tongue – these will need to be trimmed and rasped under general anaesthetic. *Prevention* of dental problems is the aim for good health.

Coprophagia: Rabbits eat caecotrophs (large, soft, dark, mucous-covered droppings) straight from their bottom to improve the digestion of the food by passing it through their gut twice. They will not re-eat the caecotrophs if the diet is too rich, they are in pain, stressed or they are too fat to get round to them. If they are not eaten they stick to the bottom causing dermatitis and fly strike (maggots).

Behaviour, Handling and Husbandry

Prey Species: Wild rabbits are preyed upon – this helps explain the behaviour we see in pet rabbits, e.g. they need to be constantly vigilant, can be jumpy and prone to stress and they tend to hide any sign of weakness so they are not singled out by a predator. This makes it difficult to recognise when a rabbit is in pain, unwell or frightened.



Rabbits are very vulnerable to stress – avoid this with careful handling and provide an enriched environment.

Observe your rabbit: Do this from a distance at different times of the day to understand your rabbit's normal behaviour. This will make it easier to recognise abnormal behaviour indicating pain, stress or another problem.

Daily checking: Each day check your rabbit from top to toe, examine underneath for any abnormality, check your rabbit's water and food intake and their urine and faeces output for any changes and remove any soiled bedding.

Accommodation: Hutches must be of an adequate size with a hiding place, protection from predators, shelter from rain, sun, direct wind and adequate ventilation. Provide a stimulating environment with a large grass run and things to climb on. Clean out hutches completely at least once a week and weigh your rabbit – continued weight loss may be an early indicator of a problem. Do not confine a rabbit to a hutch for long periods. Rabbits can also be kept indoors and trained to use litter tray.

Fly Strike (Myiasis)



FLY LAYING AN EGG

Preventative Regime for Flystrike:

Use Rearguard™ every 12 weeks over the summer months if your rabbit is prone to faecal or urine soiling.

It is very important that the rear end of your rabbit is clean, dry and odour free. A rabbit soiled with faeces or urine is at a high risk of fly strike in warm weather when blowflies are attracted to the smell of soiled fur. The flies lay eggs on the fur which hatch out into larvae (maggots). These burrow into the rabbit's flesh and crawl under the skin causing large wounds and entering body cavities.

Rabbits with fly strike become depressed and require urgent veterinary attention to remove the maggots and treat the skin damage. If treatment of fly strike is discovered too late then it is usually fatal.

Prevention and protection

Treat the causes of faecal/urine soiling: e.g. dental disease, inadequate diet, obesity, bladder infections.

Owner check: Inspect your rabbit for fly eggs at least once a day (several times a day if your rabbit has diarrhoea), including turning the rabbit over to examine the rear end.

Insecticides: We advise Rearguard™, a prescription veterinary product which stops maggots developing should fly strike occur, one application lasts 12 weeks. Fly repellent strips can also be placed near hutches.

Insurance

We strongly recommend the principle of veterinary insurance to enable you to take advantage of the best treatments available without the worrying burden of the cost should illness or accident occur.