

# RABBIT HEALTH ALERT

Myxomatosis is a deadly disease affecting rabbits that has been confirmed in the Vallejo, Rohnert Park and Sebastopol areas. The virus was intentionally introduced into Australia in 1926 and later into Europe in an effort to control the European rabbit. The first North American case of Myxomatosis was diagnosed in San Diego in 1928. Myxomatosis viral strains have varying degrees of virulence, with the California strain being one of the most devastating.

**If your rabbit lives outdoors or is allowed outdoors to play, he or she is at risk.** The reason is that the most common way rabbits are infected is by flea and mosquito bites. Contrary to what some of us believe, mosquitoes are active throughout the day, not only at dusk and dawn. They prefer shade, which is where your rabbit might rest if taken outside to romp. Although mosquitoes and fleas are primary vectors, any biting insect such as ticks, biting flies, gnats, and fur mites can transmit the virus.

**Prevention of myxomatosis is the only defense against the disease. Rabbits should not be allowed outdoors.** Control of fleas and mosquitoes is critical. Screening of windows and doors is the most effective mechanism for exclusion of the fleas and mosquitoes into your home. Use of appropriate flea control products is valuable. However, if you use Advantage to protect your animals from fleas and administer it on a four week schedule, fleas jumping onto the animal can bite at least once before becoming disabled in weeks three and four. Your Advantage-treated cat or dog may well carry a flea into your home that is still capable of biting and infecting your rabbit with myxomatosis.

The incubation period for myxomatosis is 2-3 weeks. Consult your veterinarian immediately if your rabbit exhibits any of the following symptoms.

## **EARLIEST SYMPTOMS:**

- ◆ Lethargy, more sleep than usual; less playful
- ◆ Slight elevation in temperature—i.e. 104 degrees
- ◆ Increased water consumption
- ◆ Decreased interest in food, except for favorites; significant drop in amount eaten

## **4 – 6 DAYS:**

- ◆ Resumes near normal activity level
- ◆ Interest in food increases. Eats more than usual. Eats in pronounced "stages" leaving the vegetables or pellets after every few mouthfuls to return later and hungrily eat more.
- ◆ Water consumption drops below normal
- ◆ Temperature returns to normal
- ◆ Seems uncomfortable or sits in litter box for extended periods of time when this had not previously been a habit
- ◆ If there is a clear ocular discharge, the eye will appear mildly irritated.

- ◆ Top of nose looks as though it has been rubbed pink with a few hairs taken off in the process.

#### **7 – 10 DAYS:**

- ◆ Interest in water increases, but consumption does not
- ◆ Interest in food increases, but actual consumption begins dropping
- ◆ Decreased size in fecal pellets
- ◆ Rarely stretches out to rest. Sits upright nearly always. Rarely changes posture or position.
- ◆ Seems stiff or moves about with greater effort
- ◆ Ears feel icy
- ◆ Dazed or dopey when awoken from sleep
- ◆ If rabbit had a weepy eye, there is a slight increase in lid swelling.
- ◆ Develops a clear nasal discharge
- ◆ Develops small linear welts or pink pimple-like bumps on the nose above the nostrils.
- ◆ Develops blister-like lesions on abdomen and/or around genitals.

#### **10-14 DAYS:**

- ◆ Eating and drinking take longer and the actual volume consumed continues to drop dramatically. Trouble chewing, drinking water, and/or swallowing.
- ◆ Visits to water dish or bottle increase
- ◆ Difficulty urinating; urine may appear brown
- ◆ Muscle tone and firmness of body decreases
- ◆ Develops a distinct musky "sick"odor
- ◆ Skin looks stippled and bruised as coagulation is affected
- ◆ Genitals, anus, nostrils, lips, eyelids, or ears swell
- ◆ Fecal pellets become smaller and include thick mucus indicative of an irritated bowel

#### **FINAL DAYS:**

- ◆ Bunnies hang over water dish, eventually laying down in front of the bowl resting chin on edge
- ◆ Food is mouthed, but left intact and uneaten
- ◆ Tongue swells and becomes purple in appearance
- ◆ Temperature spikes to 105 and above
- ◆ Breathing becomes raspy
- ◆ When lifted, the body cavity seems filled with pudding or other gelatinous substance
- ◆ Convulsive, struggling to breathe

**There is no known treatment against myxomatosis.  
It is always fatal. Keep your rabbit indoors.**