Rabbit Illnesses

Disease, Treatment & Prevention

* Ask your local veterinarian for dosage levels when using antibiotics and for names of antibiotic powders and ointment.
** When antibiotics are a part of the treatment program, a withdrawal period of 10 days must be allowed before the animal is slaughtered for food.
** This information on disease was compiled from Rabbits, Rabbits Rabbits which was reviewed by Dr. David J. Black, University of Tennessee, College of Veterinary Medicine; and Dr. T. J. Lane, University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine. It was edited by Loretta Rodriguez using literature from Dr T. E. Reed and revised by Dr. Richard Miles, University of Florida.
Abscesses

- **Causes**: Bacterial Infection.
- **Treatment**: Clip the fur around the abscesses, then lance and remove the pus. Disinfect with peroxide and use an approved antibiotic ointment or powder to promote healing.
- **Signs and Symptoms**: Enlargements under skin near jaw. Can occur on other parts of the body where there are wounds or scratches.
- **Prevention**: Minimize fighting. Eliminate sharp objects that can injure a rabbit.
Caked Mammary Gland

- **Cause**: Milk production is in excess of utilization. Too few young or the young are not nursing.

- **Treatment**: Relieve some congestion by partial milking. Massage gland with an anti-inflammatory ointment.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: One or more of the mammary glands may become swollen, hot and firm. Often mistaken for mastitis.

- **Prevention**: Reduce ration by one-half the day the doe kindles and gradually increase full feed in 7 days.
Coccidiosis

- **Cause:** Five different species of protozoa that can injure the bile ducts, intestine or cecum.

- **Treatment**: Sulfaquinoxaline in feed or drinking water continuously for 2 weeks.

- **Signs and Symptoms:** Affects primarily young rabbits. In severe cases, symptoms are diarrhea, loss of flesh, pot belly, loss of appetite, rough coat fur. Liver may be white spotted and enlarged and there may be small hemorrhages in the intestine.

- **Prevention:** Keep pens clean and prevent fecal contamination of feed or water. Use wire floor pens.
Conjunctivitis “Weepy eye”

**Cause**: Inflammation of eye lid. Can result from irritation by dust, sprays, fumes, or bacterial infection.

**Signs and Symptoms**: Excessive tear formation and dark fluid runs down cheek. Rabbit rubs eyes with its front feet which further aggravates the condition. Rabbits with “snuffles” frequently have weepy eye”.

**Prevention**: Minimize fighting. Eliminate sharp objects that can injure a rabbit.

**Treatment**: Use a commercial eyewash product to remove dust, dirt or other foreign object. If inflammation persists, an ophthalmic ointment containing antibiotics may be helpful.
Ear Canker

- **Cause**: Ear mites.

- **Treatment**: Use a cotton swab to apply mineral, vegetable or olive oil over all visible crust. Inject or apply an antiparasitic medication.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Scabs or a crust starts forming at base of inner ear. Mites cause considerable irritation and rabbit shakes its head and tries to scratch ears with hind legs.

- **Prevention**: Do not let unaffected rabbits in contact with rabbits that have ear canker. Place three drops of oil in rabbits’ ears once a month.
Enteritis: *Diarrhea*

- **Cause**: Likely caused by coccidiosis or other intestinal inflammation. In young rabbits excessive “greens” will cause diarrhea.

- **Treatment**: Keep rabbits comfortable and encourage feed consumption. A medicated or vitamin fortified feed may be helpful.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: A watery diarrhea may be only symptom.

- **Prevention**: Develop a program to control coccidiosis. Do not feed “greens” to rabbits.
Mucoid

- **Cause**: Thought to result from an irritant, a toxin or other stressors such as dietary changes, antibiotics and travel. Not thought to be contagious.

- **Treatment**: No successful treatment known, but mortality may be slightly reduced by feeding a medicated or vitamin fortified feed. Cull all affected rabbits.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Characterized by sub-normal body temperature, loss of appetite, depression, rough fur coat, tooth grinding, dehydration, bloated abdomen and diarrhea containing mucus material.

- **Prevention**: Prevent or reduce the number and intensity of stressors in the environment. Maintain strict sanitation of hutches, feeding and watering equipment.
Eye infections

- **Cause**: Several types of bacteria.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: The eyes of rabbit kits may stick shut and pus around the eyes may be noticed.

- **Prevention**: Prevent cold drafts and other stressors.

- **Treatment**: Apply an antibacterial ophthalmic eye ointment.
Fur Block “Hairball”

- **Cause**: Rabbit ingests a large amount of its own hair or another rabbit’s in a short period of time.

- **Treatment**: An oral dose of ½ oz. mineral oil may be effective. If the fur block is too large, surgical removal is necessary.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Rabbit will sporadically eat small amounts of feed. A firm mass can be palpated in the stomach.

- **Prevention**: Fur block is noted more often in Angora rabbits.

Hair ball size compared to coin.
Fungus Infection

- **Cause**: Fungus.

- **Treatment**: Apply tolnaftate to affected area. Other medications are available.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: A dry scaly skin (dandruff) on the shoulders and back. Could also manifest itself on other parts of the body near mucosal orifices (such as eye and nose).

- **Prevention**: Prevent contact with affected rabbits.
Heat Exhaustion

- **Cause:** Excessively high temperatures (above 85°F) and high humidity (above 70%), obesity, poor ventilation, insufficient water and crowding.

- **Signs and Symptoms:** Increased respiration rate (panting), prostration, and excessive saliva discharge. Pregnant does and young in the nest box are more susceptible.

- **Prevention:** Provide shade, adequate air movement, plenty of cool water on a hot day. A frozen water bottle tied to the cage will aid in cooling.

- **Treatment***: Rabbits suffering from heat exhaustion can be immersed in lukewarm water to reduce body temperature to the normal 101-104°F. Apply a cool compress to the ears.
**Hutch Burn**

- **Cause**: Usually associated with wet and dirty hutches. Urine and fecal mater cause the skin become irritated and infected.

- **Treatment**: Clean affected area with a germicidal soap and keep the area clean.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Usually a brownish crust covers the infected areas and a bleeding exudate may be seen.

- **Prevention**: Do not allow fecal mater to accumulate in the hutch.
Ketosis

- **Cause**: Obesity, large litter, lack of exercise.
- **Signs and Symptoms**: Usually occurs just before or just after kindling. Does go off feed and will not eat.
- **Prevention**: Prevent young does from getting too fat and make sure the does are eating at kindling time.
- **Treatment**: Obesity can be prevented by limiting feed to 4 to 6 oz. a day for does.
Mastitis “Blue Breasts”

- **Symptoms**: The mammary gland will become red in color, swollen, tender and dark blue streaks may appear.

- **Prevention**: Reduce any chance of injury to mammary gland as the doe enters the nest box. Do not transfer the young to another lactating doe.

- **Cause**: A bacterial infection in the mammary gland caused by an injury from nest box, cage or a bite from a nursing kit.

- **Treatment**: Penicillin is effective against *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus* or a similar organism.
Malocclusion “Buck Teeth”

- **Cause**: An inherited condition characterized by excessive growth of the front teeth.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Lower teeth protrude and upper teeth curve into mouth.

- **Prevention**: Do not use rabbits with “buck teeth” for breeding purpose.

- **Treatment**: Teeth on young rabbits can be trimmed until they reach slaughter weight.
Pasteurellois “Snuffles”

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Typical early signs are a nasal discharge, watery eyes, head shaking, sneezing or rattling noise in breathing and a loss of weight. Continual infection may cause rabbits to become sterile.

- **Prevention**: Quarantine all new rabbits for a 3 week period. Cull rabbits that show continuous chronic symptoms of the disease. Reduce stressors and have good management and sanitation practices.

- **Cause**: A chronic upper respiratory ailment caused by a bacterial infection.

- **Treatment**: Tetracycline in feed may be effective in an uncomplicated case. For accurate treatment, the organism needs to be cultured and identified.
Pneumonia

- **Cause**: A bacteria or virus infection usually associated with other respiratory diseases or stress factors such as damp, drafty and unsanitary hutches.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Elevated temperature, labored breathing, nasal discharge and loss of appetite are symptoms.

- **Prevention**: Control of “snuffles” reduces occurrences of pneumonia. Eliminate drafts and wet conditions.

- **Treatment**: Treatment may vary depending upon the causative agent. A broad spectrum antibiotic may be helpful.
Ringworm

- **Cause**: A fungus infection that can appear on any part of the body but most often will occur on the head. This fungus infection can be transmitted to humans.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Loss of hair in circular patches. A yellowish crust forms and sloughs off in about 3 weeks. If infection goes untreated, considerable scratching will occur.

- **Prevention**: Do not allow infected rabbits in contact with other rabbits. Wear gloves when handling the infected rabbit.

- **Treatment**: Clip the fur around affected area and treat with tolnaftate. Other medications are available.
Salmonellosis “Scours”

- **Cause**: Several members of the Salmonella group of bacteria can affect rabbits.
- **Treatment**: Tetracycline in the feed may be effective.
- **Signs and Symptoms**: General symptoms are diarrhea, loss of weight, conjunctivitis, and rapid breathing.
- **Prevention**: Good husbandry practices and a quarantine of new rabbits.
Skin Mange

- **Cause**: An infestation of mites that burrow through the skin and cause considerable irritation. Mange mites that affect dogs and cats can infect rabbits.

- **Treatment**: Dust with an insecticide approved for skin mange. Treatment should be repeated in 7 days.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: There will be some hair loss, scaly skin and intense itching and scratching.

- **Prevention**: Infected rabbits should be separated and treated. The premises should be disinfected.
**Sore Hocks**

- **Cause**: A bruised or infected area on the undersurface of the hock joint. Related stressors are a dirty hutch, rough surfaces on floor constructed with the wrong size wire grid.

- **Treatment**: Wash the hock with a germicidal soap and apply an antiseptic such as tincture of iodine or an aluminum powder based spray.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Scabs usually appear in the bottom of the rear feet. Pad and toes may become infected. Nervous and heavy rabbits are more susceptible to the sore hock condition, as are Rex breeds.

- **Prevention**: Do not let wet litter and manure accumulate. Eliminate sharp objects on the floor.
Spirochetosis “Vent Disease”

- **Cause**: Infection by a spirochete and can be transmitted by mating.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Blisters or scabs occur on the sex glands and/or other mucosal orifices.

- **Prevention**: Always check the breeders before mating. Isolate all new rabbits.

- **Treatment**: Injection of penicillin is the best treatment. Do not breed until all lesions disappear.
Tyzzer’s Disease

- **Cause**: A bacterial infection usually associated with stressors and poor sanitation.

- **Treatment**: Treatment with antibiotics is not very effective.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: The acute form results in diarrhea, dehydration and death within 48 hours.

- **Prevention**: The best preventative measures are clean stock and good husbandry practices.

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Hemorrhagic typhilitis
Warbles

- **Cause**: The growth of botfly larvae under the skin.

- **Treatment***: Remove the larvae without crushing it. Clean the wound with germicidal soap or apply an antibiotic powder or ointment to prevent infection.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: Warbles can be observed as enlargements under the skin with a small hole in the center. The condition is painful and the rabbit may lick the area.

- **Prevention**: Screen the area where the rabbits are kept in order to keep away the botfly.
Wry neck

- **Cause**: Inflammation of the balance mechanism deep within the ear. The inflammation of the inner ear is usually caused by the organism *Pasteurella multocida*.

- **Treatment**: Use injectable terramycin as ear ointment placed in both ears each day for about fifteen to seventeen days. Effectiveness increases the sooner treated.

- **Signs and Symptoms**: The head will be tilted to one side. The degree of head tilt will vary considerably, can be so severe that the animal will not be able to stand on its feet. They will usually continue to eat and drink.

- **Prevention**: Wry neck is usually associated with high incidents of "snuffles". Adequate ventilation within the rabbitry decreases the incidents of "snuffles" and Wry neck.