

# Myxomatosis in rabbits

## Overview

- Myxomatosis is a virus that causes severe disease and is usually fatal.
- It's common in wild rabbits and spreads easily to pet rabbits.
- It spreads through insect bites or by contact with an infected rabbit.
- Myxomatosis is a devastating disease; it attacks the eyes, skin, lungs and genitals. Most rabbits die from myxomatosis approximately 2 weeks after developing symptoms.
- Vaccination is the best way to protect your rabbit from myxomatosis.



*A rabbit with myxomatosis*

## What is myxomatosis

Myxomatosis is a virus that causes severe disease in rabbits. Sadly, it nearly always causes death.

Vaccinating your rabbits is the best way to protect them against myxomatosis. Vaccinated rabbits can still catch myxomatosis but they have a better chance of surviving the disease (with treatment from your vet).

## Symptoms

- Swollen eyes
- Weepy eyes (milky)
- Swollen genitals
- Swollen face and ears
- Ulcers/scabs on the face and body
- Low energy (lethargy)
- Runny nose
- Difficulty eating or drinking
- Hot to touch (high temperature/fever)
- Breathing problems

## Treatment and outlook

### Unvaccinated rabbits

If your rabbits aren't vaccinated, they are very unlikely to survive myxomatosis, death rates reach nearly 100%. To prevent suffering, euthanasia (putting to sleep) is often the kindest option.

### Vaccinated rabbits

The chances of surviving myxomatosis are around 50:50 if your rabbits are up-to-date with their vaccines. Intensive care from your vet is necessary and recovery can take weeks to months.

## Prevention

### Vaccination

- Vaccination (every year) is the best way to protect your rabbits from myxomatosis.

### Prevent insect bites

- Keep your rabbits clean to avoid attracting insects.
- Insect proof their living space if possible.
- Speak to your vet for advice on the best flea protection for your rabbits.
- Cat and dog fleas can also spread the virus, make sure all your animals are regularly treated for fleas.

### Prevent contact with wild rabbits

- Keep your pet rabbits away from wild rabbits by double fencing their living space.

## After infection

The myxomatosis virus can live on hutches, food bowls, water bottles and anything else a rabbit with the disease has come into contact with. Never re-use items from a rabbit that has had myxomatosis.

## When to contact your vet

Contact your vet for an emergency appointment if you suspect your rabbit has myxomatosis or if they are showing any of the symptoms above.

**You know your rabbit best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.**

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