

Breathing Problems / Fast Breathing in Rabbits

Overview

- Is your rabbit breathing noisily or faster than usual? Are they sneezing? Do they have discharge coming from their nose and/or eyes? Any of these symptoms could indicate a problem with their lungs or airways.
- Infections, an allergy, passive smoking, heart disease and tumours are all conditions that cause breathing problems in rabbits.
- Pain can also cause fast breathing.
- Book an emergency appointment with your vet if you are worried about your rabbit's breathing. Never wait to see if they improve, left untreated a breathing problem could become much worse, or even be fatal.
- **Take great care with your rabbit if they are having trouble breathing, stress could make the problem worse and in severe cases, even cause death.**

General information

Breathing issues in rabbits tend to be serious because:

- Rabbits are unable to breathe through their mouth, which means a bunged-up nose can make breathing extremely difficult.
- Rabbits instinctually hide signs of illness to protect themselves, meaning problems often go unnoticed until they are very serious.

What's normal?

A normal, healthy rabbit should take 30 - 60 breaths per minute (when calm). They should have a clean nose, clear eyes without discharge and breathe almost silently with no real effort.

Symptoms to look out for

If your rabbit is having trouble breathing, you may notice:

- Fast breathing
- Noisy breathing
- Sneezing
- Wheezing
- Weepy eyes
- A mucky nose (or mucky front paws/legs from cleaning)
- Reduced appetite
- Being quiet/withdrawn
- They may put more effort into breathing than usual meaning you see their abdomen move when they breathe



This rabbit has discharge from his nose and sticky eyes due to a respiratory tract infection

When to contact your vet

Book an emergency appointment with your vet if your rabbit is having difficulty breathing, never wait to see if they improve. Breathing problems in rabbits can be very serious and left untreated, can be fatal. You know your rabbit best. If they don't have the exact symptoms listed above but you are concerned, contact your vet.

Find out whether you are eligible for free or low cost PDSA veterinary treatment using our checker below or visit www.pdsa.org.uk/eligibility

Causes

Breathing issues in rabbits can be caused by many different problems including:

- Bacterial lung infections such as Pasteurella and Bordetella
- Passive smoking
- Dust irritation - often from dusty bedding e.g. wood shavings or straw
- Chemical irritation – e.g. cleaning products and air fresheners
- Ammonia irritation from dirty bedding
- Something stuck in the nose or throat e.g. hay, grass or bedding
- Pain can cause fast breathing
- Heart disease
- Myxomatosis (an infectious virus)
- Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHVD)
- Lung tumours
- Nose tumours
- Tumour of the thymus gland

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