

Flystrike

Overview

- Flystrike is a very serious condition, caused by maggots feeding on skin and flesh. Left untreated, flystrike will quickly lead to severe illness and death.
- Flystrike is most common in the warmer months, and is more likely to develop under warm, wet areas of fur such as the bottom and base of the tail.
- Contact your vet for an emergency appointment if you suspect your rabbit has flystrike - the sooner your rabbit is seen, the better their chance of survival.
- Flystrike is easy to prevent by using fly repellents and by keeping your rabbits clean, fit and healthy.

General information

Flystrike is a condition that develops when fly eggs laid on a rabbit's fur hatch into maggots and burrow under the skin to feed on flesh. Flystrike is a very serious and painful condition, which often causes death.



Flystrike is mostly a problem in the warmer months (when flies are most active) and is more likely to develop in warm, wet fur, such as around the base of the tail and bottom.

Rabbits are most likely to develop flystrike if they suffer with the following:

- **Poor hygiene** - if your rabbits, or their living space is dirty, flies will be attracted to them.
- [Poor diet](#) - a bad diet can lead to diarrhoea that attracts flies.
- [Wounds](#) - open wounds attract flies.
- **Illness** - flies will be more able to lay eggs in your rabbit's fur if they are unwell, moving less or unable to clean themselves (often related to conditions such as [arthritis](#), [obesity](#) and [dental disease](#)).

Symptoms

The early signs of flystrike can be subtle, but often progress quickly and include:

- Patches of wet fur
- Being quieter than usual
- [Eating less](#)
- [Fur loss](#) around the back end and tail
- A bad smell
- Fly eggs on the fur
- Maggots
- [Open wounds or sores](#)
- [Diarrhoea / soft pellets](#)
- Collapse

Treatment

If your rabbit has flystrike, they will need emergency treatment from your vet. Treatment is likely to include:

- Pain relief

- A general anaesthetic to clip, clean and remove the maggots from under their skin
- Insecticides to kill any remaining maggots
- A fluid drip
- [Antibiotics](#) (these aren't always necessary but might be given if your rabbit has also developed an infection)

Outlook

Sadly, flystrike is often fatal because of the severe damage that maggots can cause. Your rabbit has the best chance of survival if flystrike is discovered and treated quickly.

Unfortunately, if your rabbit is very poorly because of flystrike you may need to consider whether it is kindest to put them to sleep.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet immediately for an **emergency appointment** if you notice any symptoms of flystrike. Flystrike can very quickly cause death, so the sooner your rabbit is seen by a vet, the better their chance of survival.

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.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

Prevention

It's very important and easy to prevent flystrike in your rabbits by keeping them clean, using a fly repellent in the warmer months, and by keeping them fit and healthy.

- **Cleanliness** - it's important to keep your rabbits, and their living space clean. It's also a sensible to check them all over, every day (especially their back ends and tails).

- **Insecticide sprays and lotions** - it's a good idea to use a fly deterrent during the summer months. Speak to your vet about which product to use, and how regularly to apply it.
- **Weight** - keep your rabbit slim and fit, [obese](#) rabbits are more likely to have problems cleaning themselves and are more likely to develop flystrike.
- **Monitor their poos** - [diarrhoea](#) attracts flies, contact your vet for an appointment if you notice changes in your rabbit's toileting habits, especially if they have soft droppings.

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