

Rabbit Vaccinations - the what and the why!

Part of the routine care of your rabbit includes regular vaccinations against some preventable diseases.

We vaccinate against the following three diseases:

Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 1

- RVHD1 often has no symptoms making it very hard to spot. There is sometimes bleeding from body openings such as the nose, eyes and/or anus but these are very easy to miss without daily checks.

Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 2

- RVHD2 often has no symptoms making it very hard to spot. Where symptoms do occur, the signs are easily confused with other health conditions; fever, lethargy, neurological signs (coma) and blood clotting problems.

Myxomatosis

- The full blown form of myxomatosis affects the eyelids, the skin of the ears, the lips and genitals causing swellings.
- There is a purely skin form of myxomatosis, which isn't usually fatal, which causes small thickened lumps of skin to form on the eyelids, nose, head and sometimes the shoulder. These typically fall away after 2-3 weeks.

The facts and the fiction!

Vaccination is very effective. However, vaccinated rabbits can still get a milder form of the disease. The prognosis for vaccinated rabbits is very good with the majority making a full recovery.

RVHD1 is an extremely infectious virus that is usually fatal. The RVHD1 virus kills by causing internal bleeding.

RVHD2 is a new strain of the virus RVHD1. Cases of the disease were first reported in the UK in 2015. As with RVHD1, the virus causes internal bleeding.

Myxomatosis has been present in the UK since it was introduced from South America in the 1950s. It killed a very high percentage of the wild rabbit population and still kills many wild and pet rabbits every year.

The prognosis for an unvaccinated rabbit is poor. RVHD1 is usually fatal within a couple of days to weeks and there are limited examples of rabbits surviving the disease. There have been some cases of rabbits having recovered from RVHD2 but in most cases this disease is also fatal.

The prognosis for an unvaccinated rabbit who contracts myxomatosis is usually a long and painful death with euthanasia being the kindest option.

The prognosis for a rabbit who contracts the skin form of myxomatosis or for rabbits that are vaccinated is usually good with the majority surviving without needing significant treatment.



What does a vaccination contain?

There are two vaccinations for rabbits; a combined vaccination for myxomatosis and RVHD1 and a separate vaccination for RVHD2.

How often should I vaccinate my rabbit?



Your pet rabbit can have their first vaccination from 5 weeks of age and takes three weeks to become effective. We do then advise that your rabbit receives an annual booster every 6-12 months.

How are these diseases spread?

It is a myth that RVHD1 and RVHD2 can only be caught through contact with an infected rabbit. Both viruses can be carried by:

- Birds and insects and their droppings.
- the wind.
- Soles of shoes, car tyres or other pets' feet.
- An infected rabbit or their droppings.
- Owners' hands or clothes.



The virus can survive for months in the environment, especially in cold temperatures.

Myxomatosis is mainly spread by direct contact with fleas. Rabbits fleas are the most common carriers but flying and biting insects can also spread it. Rabbits can also catch the disease through direct contact with other rabbits.