

Emergency care for rabbit owners



Vets Now work in partnership with your daytime vet to provide a dedicated Out Of Hours veterinary clinic in your area.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you are concerned about your pets health at night, weekends or during bank holidays.

The logo for Vets Now features a red ECG line that forms the letter 'V'. To the right of this symbol, the word 'Vets' is written in red and 'now' is written in black. Below this, the tagline 'Improving the lives of vets & pets' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.
Vets now
Improving the lives
of vets & pets

Emergency Situations

In an emergency situation it is important to try to remain calm. Always phone your vet before attending in order to check which surgery to attend. When calling the vet please have a pen and paper ready to write down any instructions or directions. Out with daytime practice hours the Vets Now emergency clinic is available to provide immediate first class care. Maps with directions to your local Vets Now clinic are available from your vet or on our website at www.vets-now.com

What to do in an emergency...

These are some of the most common emergencies that occur in rabbits and some general advice on how to deal with them. Remember that this leaflet is not designed to replace your vet! Always seek veterinary advice if you are concerned about your rabbit.

Breathing Difficulties

Please contact your vet as soon as possible if you notice a discharge from the eyes and nose with noisy breathing, increased breathing rates, or open mouthed breathing, as these may indicate respiratory infections or heat stress. Heat stress is common in the summer as rabbits do not sweat and so must not be exposed to temperatures above 20-24°C.

Loss of Appetite

This may happen gradually or suddenly and may be associated with abdominal pain, abdominal swelling, the passing of mucus instead of droppings or increased salivation and wet fur around the mouth. A loss of appetite is not a specific indicator of one disease but may be serious as it can lead to lack of gut movements (gut stasis) which can result in the onset of shock due to bacterial poisons released in the rabbit's gut. It is advised that any rabbit not eating for more than 12 hours should be seen immediately.

Swellings

These may be due to abscesses (common around the head in particular) or tumours. In most cases these appear gradually over days to weeks, but may only be noticed when they reach a certain size. You should contact your vet for advice as soon as possible on discovering any unusual lumps or bumps on your rabbit.

Loss of balance and/or head tilt

You may see all or some of the following:

- A head tilt
- Circling continuously in one direction
- An inability to stand up properly

This may be associated with bacterial infections of the middle and inner ear or infections of the brain with the protozoal parasite *Encephalitozoon cuniculi*. Rabbits affected by this condition should be kept as quiet as possible with dimmed lighting to avoid self injuries occurring. You should contact your vet as soon as possible in these cases.

Paralysis of One or More Limbs

Paralysis of one leg may be associated with a fracture, nerve damage or a dislocation. Paralysis of both hind legs is more likely to be associated with a spinal injury such as a fracture or subluxation. These sorts of injuries are common in rabbits. Any rabbit showing signs of paralysis should be seen immediately.

Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)

Myxomatosis is a virus spread by the rabbit flea. It causes a gradual swelling of the area around the eyes, anus and genitals and in un-vaccinated rabbits is frequently fatal.

VHD is a virus spread from rabbit to rabbit. In un-vaccinated rabbits it is fatal, with sometimes no warning signs. In rabbits which survive the first few days after infection, diarrhoea with blood is often seen.

In both cases, it is best to get your rabbit vaccinated by your own vet initially. If you do see any symptoms mentioned, then your rabbit should see a vet immediately.