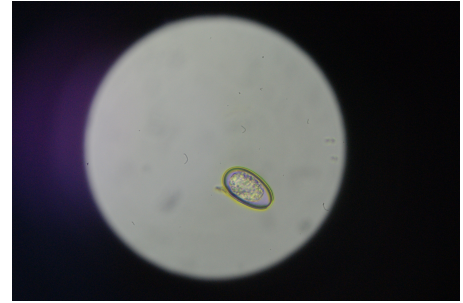




COCCIDIA IN RABBITS

What is Coccidia?:

Coccidiosis (infection with coccidia) is a disease of rabbits caused by a class of single-celled organism known as a protozoa. These are parasites of epithelial cells invading the mucosa of the intestine, colon and epithelium of various tissues. There are around 12 species of coccidian associated with rabbits and a single rabbit can have two or more species at one time.



How can my rabbit contract Coccidia?:

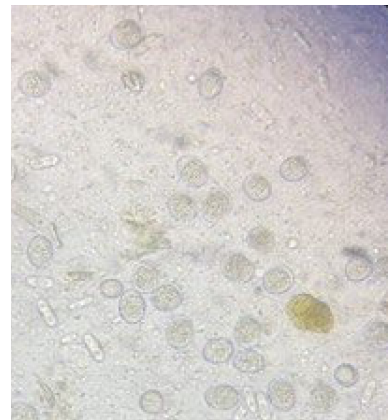
Coccidiosis is a disease that can be contracted from the environment and usually is present in multi rabbit situations as well as in shelters/breeding establishments where stocking rates are high and rabbits are kept in communal runs. Oocysts (eggs) passed in faeces require 2 or more days to become infective and in damp conditions can often remain in the environment for long periods of time. Other rabbits are infected by eating contaminated fresh vegetation like grasses.

How is Coccidia diagnosed?:

A faecal test looked at under the microscope by a vet can determine if the rabbit is shedding coccidia eggs in their faeces.

How does Coccidia affect my rabbit?:

Hepatic (liver) coccidiosis is caused by *Eimeria stiedai*. Young rabbits can be very susceptible, especially if introduced into an area of high environmental contamination. Infection can result in biliary obstruction and an enlarged fibrotic liver. Clinically this can be seen as weight loss, ascites, jaundice and diarrhea depending on severity of infection. Infected young are often underweight and have pot-bellied appearance.



Intestinal coccidiosis can be caused by numerous species of *Eimeria*. Infection is seen in the ileum and jejunum and can be diagnosed on post mortem with intestinal mucosa scrapings. Clinically this disease can present as inappetance, weight loss, depression and in some cases, diarrhea. As with the hepatic form, rabbits newly introduced into an area of high environmental contamination are most susceptible, this is often young rabbits.





How can I treat Coccidia?:

Treatment is with an oral medication and the most applicable in a pet rabbit situation is generally toltrazuril. This is generally given for a course of 2 days then repeated 5 days later. A faecal sample is then retested at the end of the course to ensure the rabbit is no longer shedding the coccidia eggs.

How can I prevent my rabbit from contracting Coccidia?:

Prevention of this disease relies on good hygiene and keeping the bedding dry, foods from uncontaminated bowls and hay/salad racks, rather than allowing the rabbit to feed off the hutch floor. If rabbits are allowed access to an outdoor run, moving the run around the garden reduces the number of oocysts they are exposed to. Ultraviolet light from the sun helps disinfect the ground and destroy the coccidian eggs. A reduction in the number of rabbits housed together is essential and minimise introducing new rabbits into the group.

If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

