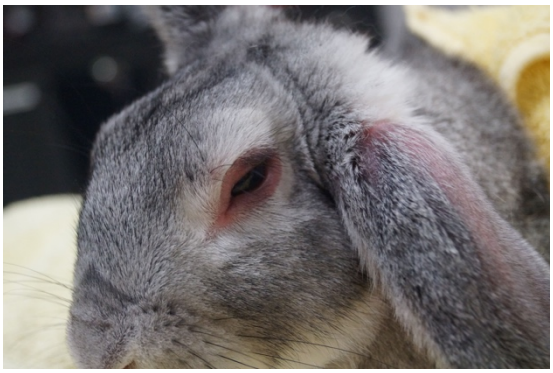
Myxomatosis

Myxomatosis (infection with the Myxoma virus) is a highly contagious disease seen in rabbits. In Australia wild rabbits act as a reservoir host for domestic rabbits. The seasonal prevalence for myxomatosis is generally over October to May but can occur at other times as well.

Transmission is by direct contact, aerosolisation of the virus particles and biting insects (mosquitoes, fleas, mites and biting flies).

Prevention in Australia is by housing inside/under mosquito netting and controlling insect vectors. There is no vaccine available to date in Australia.



Disease in pet rabbits is often the classical form, with death resulting within an average of 11-18 days. Prognosis of survival in pet rabbits is reported to be less than 0.1%. There is no safe and easy commercial diagnostic test in rabbits for the myxoma virus available in Australia. Confirmation of infection can be clinically confirmed with the presence of thickened ears, swollen eyes and swollen genital region. If we are not confident on a diagnosis of myxomatosis, we may prescribe 3-4 days of an anti-inflammatory pain relief.

Partial immunity can be seen in wild rabbits, however this is very rare in pet rabbits. This can result in a chronic form of myxomatosis with multiple black raised skin lesions.

Treatment of pet rabbits is often futile and poses moral questions regarding protracted suffering. Treatment is very rarely successful and requires full isolation, fluid therapy, pain relief, assisted feeding (syringe feeding and nasogastric tube feeding in later stages) with 24-hour care generally needed.

Disinfection of hutches, food bowls and immediate surroundings is required prior to the introduction of another rabbit. Recommended disinfectants include those with a broad spectrum of activity such as 10% household bleach. Thorough rinsing is advised to prevent ingestion. It is difficult to ensure complete disinfection of concrete/wooden hutches, carpet and if vegetation/soil is present.

Replacement rabbits are not advised for at least 4 months. This not only allows reduction of the virus in the immediate environment but also a reduction in neighboring wild rabbit populations/insect vectors due to seasonal changes.

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