



Rabbit Vaccinations

Rabbits are the third most popular pet in the UK. Just as with cats and dogs, vaccinations are available to protect rabbits against common diseases. Vaccination can prevent diseases which are distressing and usually fatal.



How do vaccines work?

A vaccine is a liquid containing bacteria or viruses that is used to stimulate an immune reaction. Because the immune system has memory, it will produce a quicker and stronger response to subsequent contact with the infection being vaccinated against.

The bacteria or virus in the vaccine is killed or altered so that it stimulates an immune reaction, but does not cause disease. Killed vaccines are less likely to cause disease, but also produce a weaker immune response.

What can rabbits be vaccinated against?

Myxomatosis

This is a viral disease that is spread by rabbit fleas and other biting insects.

Affected rabbits are depressed, and develop swelling around the eyes and ears, accompanied by discharge from the eyes and nose. This disease is usually fatal with the only option being euthanasia. Very mild cases may respond to symptomatic treatment.

Wild rabbits with myxomatosis can often be seen at the side of the road.

Viral haemorrhagic disease (VHD)

This is a disease that is spread by direct contact with an infected rabbit or with contaminated objects such as hutches, food and clothing.

The virus causes severe damage to several internal organs, but primarily the liver. Because the disease is so acute, affected rabbits are often found dead. Other symptoms include depression and bleeding from the eyes and nose. There is no treatment for this disease and it is always fatal.



Do house rabbits need vaccination?

Because of the way they are spread, both these diseases can affect rabbits kept indoors.

Myxomatosis can be caught from biting insects such as midges, which can fly substantial distances. Viral haemorrhagic disease can be spread on bedding, feed, or on people's feet, over several hundred miles.



When can I get my rabbit vaccinated?

Vaccination can be given from five weeks of age. There is now a combined vaccine that covers against both myxomatosis and viral haemorrhagic disease.

Annual boosters are advisable. The new vaccine provides a longer immunity against myxomatosis, so that six-monthly boosters for myxomatosis are no longer necessary.



What are the risks?

As with most vaccinations, a localised swelling can sometimes be seen at the site of injection, but it is not painful and usually disappears within three weeks. Allergic reactions have been reported, but are uncommon.

For further information on rabbit vaccinations, please contact the practice.

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