

Encephalitozoon Cuniculi - The Silent but Fatal Rabbit Parasite



E. cuniculi is a rabbit parasite that can in some cases can prove fatal. The parasite is excreted in urine which then can contaminate the environment for up to 4 weeks. If a rabbit eats from this contaminated area then they can become infected, this means it is particularly a risk for baby rabbits if their mother carries the parasite.

Once the parasite has been ingested it passes through the gut and can spread all over the body. The main areas the parasite attacks are the eye, kidney and central nervous system.

The problem with this parasite is that not all infected rabbits show signs of being unwell. So your rabbit might appear completely normal but still have the parasite and therefore be a risk to other rabbits which may become ill with it. Rabbits that carry the parasite without appearing unwell may still suffer with problems as a result later in life.

The common clinical signs you may see relating to the parasite are ; weight loss, lethargy, increased thirst, increased urination, discoloured urine, cataracts, painful/sore eyes, seizures, head tilt, paralysis of back legs, falling to one side, inability to stand and sometimes sudden death.

In general the vet can be quite confident of the diagnosis by the clinical exam and history alone but blood and urine tests are available.

Treatment very much depends on the degree of damage the parasite has caused. Even once the parasite has been killed the damage it has done is not always reversible which means that recovery can be very limited. When the clinical signs are not severe then symptomatic treatment and anti-parasite treatment can be successful.



There are ways to protect your rabbit from this potentially fatal disease, which just involves 7 days of anti-parasite therapy 4 times a year. This same treatment can be used to stop shedding and treat any rabbits that could be carrying the parasite silently.

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