



Myxomatosis Alert July 2010

Overview.

In July 2010, 3 fatal cases of myxomatosis (mix-oh-ma-tow-sis) in rabbits were reported in two homes in a neighborhood in the San Gabriel Valley. The rabbits died in the last two weeks of June. The pet rabbits lived mostly indoors but had access to the outdoors, where they could have been bitten by mosquitoes, fleas, or black flies. One case was confirmed after death by biopsy of swollen skin. All three rabbits showed typical symptoms (see description below). Blood tests on two rabbits showed low white blood cell counts, and increased liver enzyme and kidney values.

What is myxomatosis?

Myxomatosis is disease of rabbits caused by a virus. The onset of illness is rapid and death may occur within days or hours. Symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, and swelling of the nose, eyelids, lips, ears, or genital area. Sudden death may occur.

Myxomatosis is found naturally in wild rabbits in California, especially along the coast. Wild rabbits are generally more resistant to the effects of the virus, but may become infected and spread the disease. In 1950, this virus was deliberately introduced into Australia in an attempt to rid the area of wild rabbits. Initially, 90% of infected rabbits died, but over several years, the mortality rate dropped to approximately 25%.

How is myxomatosis spread?

This virus can be spread from infected rabbits to other rabbits by the bites of any bloodsucking insect, including mosquitoes, fleas, black flies, and ticks. It may also spread through direct contact between rabbits or contact with surfaces contaminated by an infected rabbit.

Can people or other animals catch myxomatosis?

No. Myxomatosis causes illness only in rabbits.

How can I protect my rabbits from myxomatosis?

1. Protect your rabbits from fleas, mosquitoes, and small biting flies. Some products used to kill or repel insects are toxic to rabbits. Make sure you use only products that are safe for rabbits. It is best to keep your rabbit indoors. If you have to let your rabbit outdoors, make sure it is protected from insect bites by screens or netting that keeps out all insects. Contact your veterinarian on how to best protect your rabbit.
2. Stop mosquito breeding on your property. Check your property for stagnant water twice weekly (examples: drainage systems, flowerpots, old tires, gutters) and remove any that you find.
3. Isolate sick rabbits. if you have a sick rabbit, keep it in an area away from other rabbits. Wash your hands before and after handling the sick rabbit. Do not share rabbit equipment (bowls, cages, toys) until after you thoroughly clean and disinfect it.
4. Quarantine new rabbits. If you bring any new rabbits into your home, keep them in a cage far from your other rabbits, and use separate food and water bowls. Wash your hands well before and after handling the new rabbit.
5. Contact your veterinarian if you see any symptoms of myxomatosis in your rabbits.
6. Report myxomatosis cases in Los Angeles County to Veterinary Public Health (213) 989-7060.