

Bubble Trouble!

Bubbles had always been such a lively rabbit, her owners, Sally and Robin, told me. She had never needed to go to the Vets, she loved running loose in the garden and digging in the borders, in fact she had never had any problems at all. Sally and Robin loved Bubbles dearly; they had no children and, to them, Bubbles was part of their family. They would have done anything for her but unfortunately for them, and Bubbles, they were ignorant of the important things they needed to do.

Bubbles arrived in my consulting room with swellings around her eyes, face and genitals, the classic signs of **Myxomatosis**. There is no cure and, if left, she would have died a painful death. The only humane thing to do was to put Bubbles to sleep. Sally and Robin were heart broken; they thought only wild rabbits got this disease. Never having brought Bubbles to a Vets they did not realise the importance of vaccinating rabbits against such infectious diseases.

Pet rabbits should be vaccinated routinely against both rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) and myxomatosis. Both these viral diseases are widespread in wild rabbits in the United Kingdom and are likely to prove fatal in unprotected rabbits if they are exposed. There is no effective treatment for either disease. RHD is spread by direct contact between rabbits but also via indirect contact from contaminated environments and also via mechanical transfer from insects. Myxomatosis is commonly spread by fleas and other biting insects and but can also be transmitted by direct contact with other infected rabbits. Hence it can be caught from wild rabbits coming into the garden or your rabbit being bitten by an insect that has bitten a wild rabbit. So even if you live in a town there is no guarantee your rabbit is safe.

Vaccination against both diseases can now be achieved with a single inoculation with an annual booster to maintain immunity. The vaccine can be given from 5 weeks of age.

Our third most popular mammalian pet, the estimated UK domestic rabbit population is around 1.6 million pet rabbits. Unfortunately, estimates based on vaccine sales, are that fewer than 15% are vaccinated; and yet, out of all pets, rabbits are perhaps the most exposed to serious infectious disease. A recent survey estimated that nearly 12,000 cases of myxomatosis were presented to UK vets during 2011 making this the commonest preventable fatal infectious disease surveyed. Cases of rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) are sporadic and may be hard to confirm without post-mortem, but this too is endemic and presents a significant threat to unvaccinated rabbits. Rabbit owners can be

highly motivated to provide proper care for their pets, but many simply don't understand the disease threat faced by their animals.



Please don't your rabbit end up like Bubbles.

For further information on vaccinating your rabbit please contact your Veterinary Surgeon.

Jon Power BVSc cert AVP(vetGP) MRCVS. jonpower@somertonvets.co.uk