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College of Veterinary Medicine

(909) 469-5628 • FAX (909) 469-5635

Dear Rabbit Owner,

Myxomatosis is a fatal disease of pet rabbits. Myxomatosis is sometimes called “big head” disease because of the swelling around the eyes, lips and genitals that develops from this pox virus. The disease may progress rapidly to death in 24 hours or the rabbit may linger for two weeks. Humans and other animals do not get the disease. Wild cottontail rabbits are resistant. There is no successful treatment and up to 99% of rabbits die when infected with the California strain of the virus. There is a Myxomatosis vaccine in the United Kingdom, but there is no vaccine available in the United States. Supportive care and fluids are necessary to keep the rabbit comfortable. Contact your veterinarian for assistance.

As there is no effective treatment, *prevention is paramount.*

Myxomatosis is transmitted by mosquitoes, fleas and other blood-sucking insects and by direct contact with infected rabbits or items that have been in contact with infected rabbits. Prevent rabbit exposure to these insects by practicing good mosquito control measures such as protective screening, keeping the rabbits indoors at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active and eliminating any standing water in your yard. Topical parasite control products can decrease the chance of virus transmission. Advantage and Revolution have been shown to be safe for use in rabbits at the proper dose. Frontline is associated with severe toxicities in rabbits and should NOT be used. Products not sold by veterinarians or used without veterinary guidance are generally toxic to rabbits or have not been tested on rabbits. Consult your veterinarian to find the appropriate formulation and dose that will be best for you.

Prevent direct contact with the virus by avoiding rabbit contact with wild animals, infected rabbits or items that might have been contaminated by infected rabbits such as cages, hutches, dishes or caretaker clothing. Isolate suspected or affected rabbits or new additions to your household. Practice good cleaning and disinfection of rabbit items and contact areas.

Los Angeles County veterinarians should report any outbreaks of Myxomatosis by submitting a general purpose Animal Disease Reporting Form to Los Angeles County Department of Public Health:
Veterinary Public Health

On line: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet>

Or by

Fax: 213-481-2375

Sincerely,

Diane McClure, DVM, PhD, ACLAM
Associate Professor, Veterinary Medicine