

Rabbit Handbook

Diseases

Examine your animals daily. Note how much food and water are consumed, and the nature and quantity of wastes. Color, fur condition, breathing, nasal discharges and ear carriage (the way the ears are held) are indications of health. Isolate sick animals until they recover. Do not handle sick animals until after you've cared for the healthy ones.

Colds or Sniffles (rhinitis)

Cause: Bacteria, viruses or allergies.

Predisposing causes: Drafts, exposure to heat or cold, poor ventilation, dietary deficiencies or other stress factors.

Symptoms: Sneezing and a runny nose are the main symptoms. Nasal discharge may be watery to thick. The animal wipes its nose with the front paws, causing wetting or matting of the fur on the paws. The eyes may run, and often temperature is below normal. Animals suffering from sniffles often develop pneumonia.

Control and treatment: Remove infected animals from the rabbitry and isolate them. Commercial nose drops, used for other animals or human beings and containing either sulfathiazol, tetracycline or oxytetracycline, are beneficial. Apply 2 or 3 drops in each nostril morning and night.

Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lungs and accompanies many diseases. Sometimes it occurs as a primary disease.

Cause: Bacteria, virus and foreign substances.

Predisposing causes: Chilling, parasites, poisons, other infections, inhalation of gases and liquids, etc.

Symptoms: The animal doesn't eat and has difficulty breathing; its body temperature generally is elevated; and its head may be extended to relieve breathing. Death may occur soon after the illness begins.

Treatment: Accurate diagnosis is necessary before treating pneumonia. Several drugs, such as sulfa drugs and antibiotics, help speed recovery.

Enteritis and Scours

Cause: Scours, or diarrhea, generally is a symptom of some intestinal infection (enteritis) caused by parasites, bacteria, viruses, poisons, incorrect feeding or poor digestion.

Symptoms: Droppings range in consistency from semisolid to liquid; blood may or may not be present. There is a foul odor, and the area around the tail and back legs is soiled or matted. If diarrhea is not stopped soon, the animal will lose its body fluids and salts and become emaciated (thin). The fur appears ruffled and dull.

Treatment: The correct treatment for enteritis depends on its cause. If the cause is parasites, eliminate them with proper drugs. A laxative such as castor oil may be used in case the enteritis has resulted from moldy or musty feeds. Drugs such as bismuth subnitrate, kaolin, antibiotics and pectin, used for diarrhea in puppies and children, may be used for rabbits, although treatment seldom is successful.

Nose & Face Scabs (facial dermatitis)

Cause: Bacteria and fungi. Bacteria and fungi infect inflamed and irritated areas around the nose and face. The inflammation and irritation may be caused by secretions from a runny nose, bites, external parasites, rubbing the nose with the feet, gases from dirty pens, etc.

Treatment: Antibiotic injections help relieve this condition. Medication put around the mouth usually is licked off or rubbed off with the paws. Eliminate the cause of irritation.

Caked Udders (edema)

Cause: Caked udders may develop just before kindling, right after weaning or any time between kindling and weaning. Edema is a hardening of the udder because fluids have accumulated in the tissue. The udder hardens, swells and is painful to the animal when touched.

Treatment: Apply hot towels over the udder or massage and try to remove some of the milk. If baby rabbits are nursing, be sure they are well and removing the milk.

Mastitis

Cause: Bacteria and fungi. The udder becomes swollen, hot and sore to the touch, with a caked udder. Infection gets into the udder through the teat canal. Injuries and irritation from a caked udder may bring on mastitis.

Treatment: Antibiotic injections are the best known treatment. If abscesses form and rupture, treat them locally with an antiseptic such as tincture of iodine.

Abscesses and Sore Hocks

Cause: Abscesses may be caused by bacteria or an infection entering the blood stream and causing abscess anywhere in or on the body. Abscesses may form after cuts, bites or any type of abrasion where an infection may enter the skin and the tissue underneath. Sore hocks are often caused by constant exposure to wire floors or hard floors with no bedding.

Treatment: Open the abscess and drain it; clean it thoroughly with clean water; then apply an antiseptic such as tincture of iodine.