

Rabbit Handbook

Diseases, Parasites and Illnesses

How To Detect Illness

Through frequent and careful inspection, a good husbandman (one who raises and takes care of livestock or crops) can recognize when an animal is sick. This may not be easy for the beginner, but comes with experience.

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.

Dispose of all dead animals. Thoroughly clean and disinfect all contaminated hutches and equipment as soon as possible.

When diseases occur, consult your veterinarian, and ask first whether the treatment will be practical or economical. Be sure the veterinarian knows the true economic value of the animals involved, so that he or she can recommend treatments. You can take a sick animal to the veterinarian's office, but sometimes he may want to visit your colony.

Diseases are caused by living organisms such as bacteria, protozoa, fungi and viruses. Some organisms may be present in healthy animals, but do not cause illness unless the animal's resistance is lowered. Other organisms make the animal sick immediately.

An animal's resistance can be lowered by drafts, heat, cold, fright, crowding, over-feeding, overhandling, poor nutrition and sudden change of environment or feeding practices.

These are sometimes called "predisposing causes" or "stress factors." Different diseases may cause similar symptoms or conditions. Because the unskilled eye cannot determine seriousness, losses could be severe before proper treatment is administered.

Contact your veterinarian when you have doubts about an illness, when deaths occur suddenly or when illness persists. Also, consult with a veterinarian before your animals are sick, for advice on added disease control practices important in your area.