



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. Wild rabbits are more resistant to the virus but may also become infected and carry it.

How is the myxomatosis spread?

This virus can be spread from infected rabbits to other rabbits by the bites of any bloodsucking insect, primarily mosquitoes and fleas. 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 flies. Some flea products are toxic to rabbits, so make sure you use only flea control products that are safe for rabbits. Keep your rabbit indoors, especially at dusk and dawn.
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 for 14 days, 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.