



Encephalitozoonosis In Rabbits

Encephalitozoon cuniculi is a parasite which lives in the cells of mammals and commonly affects rabbits. It can also be passed onto immunocompromised humans. Around 52% of rabbits in the UK have likely been exposed but not all those will show clinical signs of disease.

The clinical signs can be quite alarming and veterinary attention should be sought if your rabbit shows any of the following:

- Head tilt
- Twisted neck
- Weakness or paralysis of the hind limbs
- Collapse and seizures
- Urinary incontinence
- Blindness

The spores are transmitted from rabbit to rabbit by both inhalation and infected urine. Therefore infected rabbits should be separated but kept within sight and smell of each other so as not to break any bonds. All housing should be cleaned with routine disinfectants.

Treatment of this condition is targeted at minimising further spore formation by using a worming paste, antibiotics are given for the secondary bacterial infections and in certain circumstances steroids may be used to limit the damage caused by inflammation.

Unfortunately, once neurological signs have developed, response to treatment can be poor.

There are a number of measures that can be taken in an attempt to control the disease:

- Worming treatment can be given as prevention and should be used 2-4 times a year.
- Routine disinfection of hutches will reduce the numbers of viable spores whilst raising bowls and the use of water bottles should minimise urine contamination. Good ventilation should aid in reducing the incidence of inhaled infection.