

Preventing flystrike in rabbits



Flystrike occurs when damp fur - often due to damaged skin or soiled by urine or faeces - attracts the green bottle fly (*Lucilia sericata*). A single fly can lay up to 200 eggs on the skin which hatch into maggots within hours. Used for centuries to help manage wounds, maggots will first eat away at damaged tissue to clean the area. However, once clean they will then continue to feed on healthy tissue and can cause extensive damage. The high levels of irritation and pain lead to stress and shock, which can be fatal.

Preventing flystrike involves ensuring rabbits and their environments are kept clean and dry. Other factors to be considered are;

- ❖ Examination - rabbits should be examined **at least twice a day** paying particular attention to their bottom area. Look for tiny white specks stuck to the skin or fur; these are the eggs. Clean away any dirt or soiled urine or faeces and dry the area well. Notice any unusual smells – flystrike can have a pungent odour.



- ❖ Grooming - some rabbits may need to be groomed regularly, especially if they struggle to groom themselves due to obesity, dental disease, or arthritic conditions. Dirty bottoms should be washed twice daily and dried thoroughly.
- ❖ Diet – avoid feeding too many fresh greens and fruit which can cause diarrhoea. At least 70% of a rabbit's diet should be high fibre such as hay.
- ❖ Medication – spot on preparations are available from your veterinary surgeon which can help prevent flystrike for up to 10 weeks but this shouldn't be used as a substitute for good hygiene and regular checks.
- ❖ Environmental – using fly screens around hutches and planting certain herbs such as rosemary, green oregano, peppermint and basil can help to reduce fly numbers.

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