

Fly Strike in Rabbits

Fly Strike in Rabbits: What You Need to Know

Fly strike, also called myiasis, is a serious and potentially deadly condition for rabbits. It's an emergency that requires immediate veterinary care.



What is Fly Strike?

Fly strike occurs when flies lay eggs on a rabbit's fur, typically around the bottom, underside, or tail where the fur might be damp or soiled. When the eggs hatch, maggots emerge and begin to eat into the rabbit's flesh, creating painful wounds. If left untreated, fly strike can be fatal within 24 hours.

Where Flies Attack:

Flies are especially attracted to areas that are dirty or damp. That's why it's so important to check your rabbit every day, particularly around the bottom, belly, and tail.



Signs of Fly Strike in Rabbits

One of the most alarming signs is seeing live maggots in your rabbit's fur or on their skin. But there are other early signs to watch for:

- Lack of energy
- Loss of appetite
- Hiding or digging into corners to escape pain
- Wet patches of fur or hair loss
- A strong, unpleasant odour

As the condition worsens, your rabbit may go into shock, becoming still and limp, with cold ears as their body temperature drops.



How Does Fly Strike Happen?

While any rabbit can get fly strike, the risk is much higher during the summer when flies are more active. Flies are drawn to dirty bedding and soiled fur, but open wounds can also attract them.

Rabbits naturally produce a type of soft, nutrient-rich droppings called caecotrophs, which they normally eat right away. But if their diet is too rich or high in sugar, these droppings can stick to their fur, making them more prone to fly strike. A rabbit with diarrhoea is also at increased risk.

Health Issues to Watch For:

Rabbits with arthritis, dental problems, obesity, or old age may struggle to groom themselves properly. If your rabbit falls into any of these categories, it's important to check them twice a day to prevent fly strike.

Can Indoor Rabbits Get Fly Strike?

Yes, even house rabbits can get fly strike. Although the risk may be lower indoors, flies can still find their way in. Daily checks for signs of fly strike are essential, no matter where your rabbit lives.

Treating Fly Strike



Fly strike is a medical emergency. If you notice any symptoms, contact your vet right away. The quicker your rabbit receives treatment, the better their chances of survival.

Treatment usually involves sedating your rabbit or administering general anaesthesia, so the vet can safely remove the maggots and clean the wounds. Your rabbit might also receive pain relief, antibiotics, and fluids through a drip. However, if the damage is too severe, euthanasia may be recommended to prevent further suffering.

Preventing Fly Strike in Rabbits

While fly strike can be devastating, there are several steps you can take to protect your rabbit:

1. Check Your Rabbit Daily:

Inspect your rabbit's fur, especially around their bottom, tail, and belly, for any signs of soiling or wounds. Rabbits with difficulty grooming should be checked at least twice a day. Regular grooming will help keep their fur clean and dry, especially for long-haired breeds like Angoras.

2. Keep Their Living Area Clean:

Daily cleaning is crucial, especially during the summer. Remove any soiled bedding and replace it with fresh materials. Every couple of weeks, give their enclosure a deep clean using a pet-friendly disinfectant to kill bacteria.

3. Monitor Diet and Weight:

A healthy diet is key to preventing digestive issues that lead to sticky droppings. Maintaining a healthy weight also ensures your rabbit can groom themselves properly, reducing the risk of soiled fur.

4. Use Fly Repellent:

In warmer months, fly screens can help keep flies out of your rabbit's living area. Vets can also recommend spot-on treatments that prevent fly eggs from hatching on your rabbit's skin. Always follow your vet's instructions for applying any treatments.



By being vigilant and taking these preventive measures, you can help protect your rabbit from the dangers of fly strike and ensure they stay safe, healthy, and happy.