



If you have a question you would like answered by Dr. Leon Riegel and Dr. Edgar Sheaffer of Valley Animal Hospital, Palmyra and Dr. Tim Trayer, Denver, send it to Ask the VMD, Box 366, Lititz, PA 17543. Questions will be kept anonymous on request.

A reader writes:
I've been raising rabbits for years. A couple months ago, I started having problems that I never had before.

Back around March, I had a young doe that had a litter in January. Soon after I took her away from the young, she started losing hair underneath and around her back legs.

I looked in books to find out about ringworm and it said 'skin inflamed in rings'

Ringworm seemed to be the closest thing to what she had, so I treated her for that. The problem cleared up and new hair grew back.

Soon after that, I noticed she only hopped on one back foot and the leg was hard.

Later, she got a hard lump on her stomach area. She got thin and wouldn't eat right.

I tried Terramycin on her, but she didn't get better. Finally I got the vet to look at her.

She told me the rabbit probably wouldn't make it. The next day, my dad killed

the rabbit. When the vet opened her up, she found a lot of pus. She said it might have been an infection.

Over the summer, I had three other rabbits at least that I lost — and they all had lumps.

It seems the hard lump appears about three to six weeks after they have a litter. Then they lose their appetites. This happens in both young and old does.

I want to know what's causing this problem and what I can do to prevent it.

My rabbits aren't purebreds. They're mixed and different colors.

I feed them a mixture of oats and rabbit pellets. To the does with young, I give them Calf Manna in addition. I also give my rabbits hay and ear corn.

Judy Landis,
R3 Box 410,
Hamburg, PA 19526

Dr. Maas comments:
In looking at the symptoms you've described, several signs could indicate possible post-weaning mastitis. Since the problem occurred in your young and old does with litters, the abdominal lumps may be mammary tissue either engorged or infected, with the infection becoming generalized in the abdominal cavity. This would also

correlate with the loss of appetite.

Treatment for this condition would entail hot packing the abdominal area after draining the mammary gland. Then an appropriate antibiotic, probably penicillin by injections, would need to be administered to combat the microorganism causing the infection.

A second possibility for the conditions you've described might be multiple abscesses — first confined to the tissue just under the skin, and later becoming generalized. Lameness, lumps, and loss of appetite would point to this.

Again, treatment is the same — opening and draining each area, followed by penicillin.

Although the multiple abscess condition is a possibility, this condition is more frequently seen in fighting males. And then, only one animal is afflicted.

The loss of hair in the first doe is probably unrelated to the other problems. Your diagnosis of the problem as ringworm, a fungus and not a worm, was no doubt correct since your treatment resulted in improvement. Ringworm is a commonly seen skin problem condition in many mammals, and is moderately to easily communicable to humans.

Treating ringworm on any mammal usually involves cleansing the areas, drying them, and applying several times for at least six weeks, an anti-fungal ointment containing tolhaftate. Often anti-fungal medication is taken orally for six weeks as well.

Some basic facts about a rabbit's life cycle may prove useful to those contemplating raising rabbits.

Gestation lasts 28 to 36 days with approximately seven babies born per litter, each weighing about 100 grams — that is, less than a quarter pound. The babies' eyes open when they are about 10 days old, and they are weaned when they are 42 to 56 days old. Puberty is reached between 4 and 9 months and the rabbits can be bred up to 6 years, though usually 1 to 3 years.

Weight at adulthood is approximately 4 kilograms for females (almost 9 pounds) and 4.3 kilograms

for males (9½ pounds). Normal body temperatures range from 101 to 103.2 degrees Fahrenheit, and life span ranges from 5 to 7 years.

A basic diet for rabbits consists of commercial rabbit pellets and greens in moderation, totaling 100 to 150 grams per day depending on age and condition, with ½ cup water per 2.2 pounds of body weight.

Since the rabbit has three pairs of incisors or gnawing teeth which keep growing, lengths of hay to chew help

prevent these teeth from becoming impacted.

The environmental temperature for rabbit housing should be 62 to 68 degrees with 50 percent humidity for optimum conditions.

Rabbits may be inoculated against contagious rhinitis or 'snuffles'. If this respiratory disease is contracted, the rabbit needs to be kept warm, rested and placed on a regimen of injectable or oral antibiotics.

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