

## FLY KILLERS & NATURAL REPELLENTS

As well as the steps listed above, you can also try to reduce the number of flies coming near your rabbit.

- Old-fashioned sticky papers (available from DIY stores and garden centres) may be used in the home or shed.

A number of plants are said to repel insects and flies. Some may be dried and hung in the home, or the rabbit shed; others may be planted in pots to sit on top of outdoor hutches, or planted in half baskets and hung on the sides of the run. Just make sure they are well out of reach of your bunny!

- The dried flowers of pyrethrum deter mosquitoes and flies.
- Pennyroyal is a low growing mint with tiny spikes of mauve flowers in summer and a strong peppermint scent.
- Nigella (Love in a Mist) is a pretty annual flower and a good fly and midge repellent.

Many herbs are said to repel flies, for example: balm, chamomile, hemp, agrimony, lavender, mugwort, rosemary, rue, peppermint, santalina (CottonLavendar), basil, shofly. Green oregano's pungent smell repels just about everything in the way of insects and its flower is enchanting.

### Summary...

As you can see, there are many things that you can do to protect your rabbit from flystrike, and some of the measures we have suggested will also enhance your garden!

### However, above all, remember:

- All rabbits need regular checks, especially in warm weather
- Healthy rabbits, eating a suitable diet, and living in clean conditions are at a much lower risk of flystrike.
- "High risk rabbits" need extra preventative measures (e.g. rearguard) as well as treatment for the medical problems that are putting them into the high risk category.



This leaflet is brought to you by the Rabbit Welfare Fund - the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association.

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In memory of Andy Bakers much treasured bunny Gizmo.



Rabbit Welfare Fund  
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# FLYSTRIKE

## Is your rabbit at risk!



# What is Flystrike?

Rabbits are said to have “flystrike” (myiasis) when flies lay eggs upon them and the eggs then hatch into maggots. Some species of fly (e.g. bluebottles and greenbottles) produce maggots that can very rapidly mature and eat into the living flesh within 24 hours. This is often rapidly fatal for the poor rabbit.

## IS MY RABBIT AT RISK?

Any rabbit can get flystrike, but certain factors increase the risk:

### Time of year

Flystrike is especially common during the summer, but can occur at any time of the year.

### Rabbits who cannot keep their bottom clean

Rabbits who suffer from “dirty bottoms”, or who have wounds or wet fur, are at very high risk of flystrike. See box for details.

## HIGH RISK BUNNIES

Rabbits with the following problems are at especially high risk of fly strike:

- Overweight or obese
- Long-haired
- Dental problems
- Runny eyes
- Females with large dewlaps
- Rabbits with folds of skin around their tummy or bottom
- Rabbits with wounds or discharging abscesses
- Old rabbits
- Rabbits with diarrhoea or loose stools
- Rabbits living in unsanitary conditions

It is very important to keep your rabbit's living quarters clean and dry: flies are attracted by damp, smelly conditions.

## THE WARNING SIGNS

High-risk rabbits should have their bottoms checked twice daily, especially in summer. However, if any bunny is quiet and listless; or appears restless and shows signs of discomfort, pick them up immediately and check for eggs or maggots.

### What do you do if you find your rabbit has maggots

- Firstly, keep calm, but telephone your veterinary practice immediately. Flystrike is a true emergency - day or night - and treatment cannot wait.
- So long as it does not delay your trip to the vet, pick off any visible maggots with tweezers. Do not dunk the rabbit in water: fur in the affected area may need to be shaved and wet fur clogs the clippers.

## HOW IS FLYSTRIKE TREATED?

Flystrike is a very serious condition and is, sadly, often fatal. However, rabbits can make a full recovery if the condition is found and treated quickly. Flyblown rabbits are usually in pain and severe shock, and need skilled veterinary and nursing care.



## TREATMENT CONSISTS OF:

### Removing external maggots

After clipping away the fur, the vet can find and remove the external maggots. This usually requires sedation or general anaesthesia, which carries a much higher risk than normal because flyblown rabbits may be in shock.

### Supportive care

Affected rabbits usually need intravenous or subcutaneous fluids; antibiotics to try to prevent infection; and plenty of pain relief. Some vets also use anti-parasitic drugs in the hope that it will penetrate the tissues and kill any remaining concealed maggots.

## PREVENTING IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN

Once a rabbit has recovered from flystrike, it's important to prevent the same thing happening again. The vet will need to find and treat any underlying health problems, and the owner must take every possible step to protect their rabbit from flies.

### Preventing Flystrike

- Check that your rabbit is eating a healthy diet (See the RWF Guide to Feeding your Pet Rabbit)
- Remove soiled bedding every day & disinfect hutches weekly
- Check your rabbit at least once a day: “high-risk rabbits” need twice-daily bottom checks in warm weather.
- Don't forget that houserabbits can also be at risk!
- Physical barriers such as adding fly-screens to hutches and runs
- Speak to your vet about specific preventative measures: “Rearguard” is a liquid that is applied by sponge to the rabbit and prevents flystrike for up to 10 weeks. It stops maggots maturing to a stage where they become dangerous.

