

Preventative Care



For rabbits who have previously had floppy bunny, some owners choose to administer the treatment (panacur) as a prophylactic (preventative).

It is important to note that there is no evidence that this is effective at preventing further incidences of floppy bunny. Many bunny owners have reported further floppy bunny cases while their bunny had been on the preventative course.

A prophylactic course involves administering the drug every six months for nine days. This is aimed to reduce the numbers of the micro-organism within the animals system. It is suggested that this burden will likely return to its former level, how quickly it does so is not known, but like many other micro-organisms, rapid growth is suspected.

Prognostic indicators:

Prognosis is generally better if;

- Bunny is able to sit by itself on all fours upright without being propped up.
- Bunny is eating.
- The disease is treated early.
- If the paralysis progressed slowly.

Prognosis is generally poor

- If bunny cannot sit upright on its own.
- If bunny is struggling to move its head.
- If bunny is not eating.

Recovery

The first 24-36 hours are the most critical in determining recovery. If treated early some bunnies will be moving more by 24 hours after the commencement of treatment



Floppy Bunny E-Cuniculi

All you need to know



Little
PAWS Rescue
Perth

What is Floppy Bunny?

Floppy bunny is the general term used to describe a paralytic disease caused by the micro-organism *Encephalitozoon Cuniculi* (EC). Floppy bunny causes a progressive paralysis which progresses from the hindlimbs and ascends up the body. As the upper body becomes paralysed the animal becomes completely floppy. Of most concern floppy bunny will eventually affect the bunny's ability to breathe and sadly many bunnies are lost to this disease.

The micro-organism typically lives within the neurological and nervous tissues of the eye, balance center of the brain called the vestibular system, the kidneys and in the case of floppy bunny the infection spreads to affect the peripheral nerves of the lower and upper body muscles. Very little is known about the true nature of the disease known as floppy bunny and the micro-organism that causes it.

A blood test can be taken to test for the presence of the micro-organism and this is often recommended for bunnies that develop floppy bunny. Of most curiosity is that up to 70% of domestic rabbits will return a positive result for EC. What this means is that most bunnies have EC but for an unknown reason it does not appear to cause disease in all but a few.

It is not yet known what the missing link is between those rabbits that have EC and show no signs of disease throughout their life and those who develop floppy bunny.

Stress and concurrent disease may not be the factor that makes floppy bunny occur in some rabbits and not others as the prevalence of EC related disease would be significantly more observed given how commonly it is found to be present in domestic rabbits.

What to Look for

Floppy bunny can progress over a few hours or in some unfortunate cases from onset of hind-limb paralysis and progression to upper body paralysis can be only minutes.

Slow Onset (1-6 hours for progression):

Bunny will be wobbly in the back legs, hips may sway side to side and will progress to dragging the legs behind. As the paralysis ascends the forelimbs will begin to become weak and eventually the bunny will not be able to hold itself up and will lay flat on its chest or on its side. When picked up bunny will be floppy, it may be able to move the muscles in his/her neck but eventually this may be lost as well.

Rapid Onset (less than 1 hour for progression):

Sadly in these cases bunny is often found either completely floppy and on its chest or side or bunny may have already gone. As soon as you see the early signs it is essential to get bunny to the vet. The veterinarian will administer a medication called Panacur (Fenbendazole). From there the only things that can be done circulate around nursing care; providing for the animals needs as best as possible.

In severe or late stage cases this is best done by the veterinarian who is able to give fluids directly into circulation or under the skin, provide external warmth in an incubation or warming box, ongoing monitoring, pressure care (turning regularly to prevent sores developing) feeding and providing pain relief where needed.

Once stabilized bunny will be able to go home and nursing care can be provided at home. It is important to be aware that the prognosis may be guarded.

Nursing Care at Home



A good setup is to use a washing basket with a heat pack at the bottom, a towel on top and prop bunny on its chest with rolled towels or blankets at either side. This ensures bunny is in a good position for ease of breathing and comfort.

Feeding and hydration:

Critical care feeds every 4 hours. Start with offering it in a bowl, if bunny is not eating it willingly it will need to be fed using a syringe. Feed roughly 5ml of watery critical care per kilogram of body weight. Mix 1 part critical care to four parts water.

Warmth:

Heat packs are essential, make sure there are two to three layers of towel between bunny and the heat pack to disperse and insulate. It is recommended to have a thermometer on hand to place under bunnies belly to check how hot the blankets are. Aim for 36 to 37 degrees.

Pressure care, urination and faeces:

Making sure that bunny doesn't develop pressure sores on boney prominences such as ankles, heels, elbows and hips. Aim to turn bunny every 4 hours and provide some passive range of motion exercises (stretching legs in and out three or four times to promote circulation). Bunny will not be able to move out of where it has soiled itself; wet wipes can be used to clean urine off bunny's hind area to prevent urine scald.