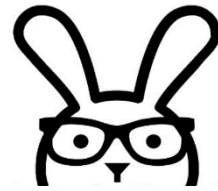


Encephalitozoon Cuniculi



@bunny_vet_nz

What is this?

Encephalitozoon Cuniculi (aka E.cuniculi or EC) is an intracellular microsporidia (fungus that grows within cells) that can cause disease in rabbits and other animals. Some rabbits can carry this parasite without any issues, and others may develop clinical signs associated with infection. Once infected, even with treatment, the rabbit will be a carrier for life.

How does a rabbit become infected?

EC spores are very good at surviving in the environment. A rabbit can become infected by inhaling or eating spores shed from the urine of an infected rabbit. Rabbits start shedding spores one month after infection, and can continue for three months post infection. They can also get infected through their mother's womb if she is a carrier.

Range of diseases/symptoms:

EC has a predilection for the cells of organs which have a large blood supply - this means that the brain, eyes, lungs, heart, and kidneys can become affected. For this reason, EC can be associated with many different presentations, such as:

- Head tilting and rolling
- Abnormal eye movements
- Paralysis
- Seizures
- Deafness
- Cataracts
- Behavioral changes
- Increased drinking and urination
- Weight loss

Diagnosis:

There is no definitive diagnosis in an alive rabbit for EC, only an idea of strong suspicion.

Ideally, a blood test is performed which reveals if your rabbit is creating an immune response to EC. Unfortunately, this blood test is not available in NZ. This means that your vet may decide it is best to try a treatment course of Fenbendazole, while trying to rule out other diseases that are associated with the clinical signs your rabbit is presenting with.

Treatment:

A 28 day course of Fenbendazole is often recommended to try and slow down or stop the worsening of clinical signs, however this does not mean that the rabbit will necessarily get rid of the parasite. They can also have “flare-ups” later on in life.

Other treatment involves symptomatic treatment for the clinical signs the rabbit is presenting with.

Prevention:

EC is a difficult disease to prevent, and most rabbits become infected with EC at some point in their lifetime.

You may like to consider treating new rabbits prophylactically with a course of Fenbendazole, however this does not mean the parasite will be eliminated, nor does it guarantee protection from future infection. Additionally, like all medications, Fenbendazole carries side effects, including bone marrow suppression (i.e. decreasing the amount of red and white blood cells being produced).

If your existing rabbit has underlying health issues, and you are considering introducing a new rabbit, it's a good idea to talk to your vet to check if a preventative course of Fenbendazole may benefit your rabbits and their introduction.