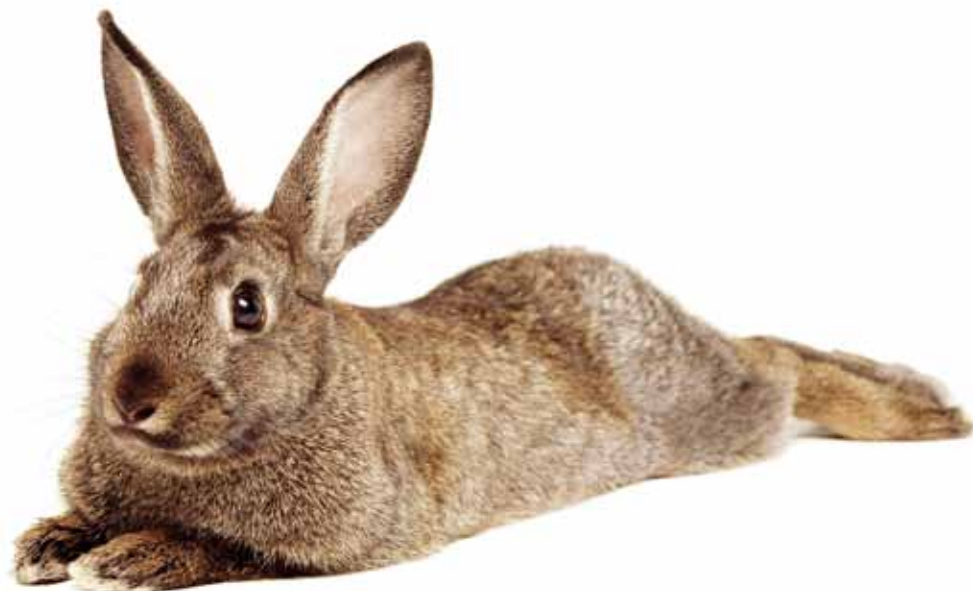


# Bird and Exotics Vet

**Dr Alex Rosenwax – BVSC MACVSc (Avian Health)  
Bird & Exotics Veterinarian, Green Square.**

Alex graduated from the University of Sydney in 1991. He achieved Membership of the Avian Health Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in 1996. In November 1996 he opened the first and only Sydney all bird and exotic pet practice. The Clinic moved to 1 Hunter St, Waterloo in 2003 and sees approximately 80% birds, and 20% fish, reptiles and other exotic pets. Alex is the current President of the Australian Veterinary Association Avian Group.

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Dear Dr. Alex,

*I live in an apartment and have a rabbit that is kept indoors. I heard that there has been a recent release of a virus for the control of wild rabbits. Is there is any way my rabbit can become sick from this?*

*J & T Manu  
Bondi Junction*

In Sydney there has been a recent re-release of a virus called Calicivirus (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease). This has been performed in several bushland areas and may also occur in other areas of Australia at various times. The virus was initially released in Australia approximately 15 years ago.

Calicivirus spreads easily within the wild and pet rabbit populations. Pet rabbits often have very low immunity to the virus and so disease in these rabbits is severe and generally fatal.

Calicivirus is transmitted directly from rabbit to rabbit, on cage materials or feed. It is also spread by certain insects or by inhaling particles of virus from the air. As it is spread by insects, indoor rabbits can still easily catch the virus.

The signs of Rabbit Calicivirus are often the sudden onset of illness which quickly leads to death. Fever, depression, weight loss, diarrhoea and bleeding from the nose or ears may be seen in the early stages. Unfortunately death occurs in almost 100% of cases. All unvaccinated rabbits (including indoor rabbits) are at risk from Calicivirus. Young rabbits may initially be protected by their mother's immune system. This maternal immunity decreases over time and so young rabbits must be vaccinated by 2 1/2 months of age. It is extremely important that all rabbits are regularly vaccinated against Calicivirus to prevent the disease as once they have the disease, hospital treatments are unlikely to help and most rabbits will die.

Our recommended vaccination program is:

- First vaccination before or at 2 1/2 months of age
- Booster vaccination 1 month later
- Booster injections every 9-12 months

In occasional cases a skin irritation can occur at the site of vaccination. This may also involve some hair loss at the same site. In most rabbits these skin problems heal without the need for treatment.

There is another virus also affecting wild and pet rabbits in Australia called Myxomatosis. Myxomatosis was introduced into Australia in the 1950s. The virus is spread by insects such as mosquitoes and fleas. It is also unfortunately usually fatal in pet rabbits. Classic Myxomatosis starts with runny eyes. In the early stages this can be confused with other causes of conjunctivitis. However in myxomatosis the genitals are also swollen. It rapidly progresses to a severe conjunctivitis which causes blindness and is

accompanied by lumpy swellings on the head, plus lumps on the body. Excessive amounts of thick pus discharge from the nose and swollen eyes and so these often become sealed shut. Affected rabbits can take a fortnight to die. Unlike Calicivirus, there is no vaccine available in Australia for Myxomatosis. Only the minimising contact with fleas and mosquitoes may decrease the chance of pet rabbits catching this virus. We recommend the regular use of monthly "spot on" anti-flea treatments to decrease the fleas on pet rabbits. We also recommend minimising contact with mosquitoes by keeping rabbits indoors or in mosquito-proof hutches at times of day when mosquitoes numbers are higher.

There is no new virus that has been released in Australia. However all rabbits including your indoor rabbit are affected by these two already present viruses. So keep your pet rabbit away from wild rabbits, have it regularly vaccinated and kept free of mosquitoes and fleas to minimise the chance of catching these serious and unfortunately fatal viruses.



*“Keep your pet rabbit away from wild rabbits, have it regularly vaccinated and kept free of mosquitoes and fleas to minimise the chance of catching these serious and unfortunately fatal viruses.”*

## HELP WANTED!

Our team of passionate volunteers travel all over the state every week attending to donkeys in need. No donkey is ever turned away.

We provide specialist care for donkeys from all circumstances – injured, abandoned, malnourished, homeless, surrendered and aged donkeys.

The ongoing needs of donkeys are endless. Caring for 260 donkeys (and counting) is only possible through the continuing goodwill and support from the general public. Please help the work continue.

Take a look at our website [www.donkeywelfare.com.au](http://www.donkeywelfare.com.au)

Donations of \$2.00 or more have tax deductible status. Please post cheques to DWWH Inc. 600 Wollombi Road, Bishops Bridge NSW 2326

**Donkey Welfare With Heart Inc.** (The Friendly Donkey People) CFN 20679

