

Do Rabbits Have Allergies?

Common allergens and health conditions that rabbits face.

By Rose Gordon

Your rabbit has red, watery eyes, so you're wondering: does my pet rabbit have hay fever? Maybe not hay fever, but your rabbit could be having an allergic reaction to something in its cage or in your house.

Rabbit allergies are a "poorly understood, poorly documented" and a "rarely diagnosed" condition, said Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP – Avian Practice.

Signs that your rabbit may be suffering from allergies include: Red eyes
Clear discharge from nose
Excessively touching its nose and face with paws
Rubbing its face on the ground repeatedly

Common irritants to rabbits include:

Carpet cleaning products

Carpet & room fresheners

Strong scents — use common sense, if something smells overpowering to you, imagine how it must smell to your tiny rabbit.

Fireplace fumes — make sure your house is well-ventilated to disperse carbon dioxide fumes.

Dust

Cigarette smoke

Mites and fleas can also cause an allergic reaction, which is often treated with cortisol, said Dr. Susan Smith, a professor in the Department of Nutrition at the University of Wisconsin — Madison and scientific advisor and fosterer for the House Rabbit Society.

After prolonged exposure to allergens, a rabbit could suffer from chronic rhinitis and bronchitis. Wissman indicated that they are also prone to respiratory infections.

Using the same preventive measures suggested for people suffering from allergies, like a fan to circulate fresh outside air in or a HEPA filter, might help relieve your rabbit's allergies. Removing the offending item from your home is the only way to ensure that the allergies do not return and your rabbit does not develop a more serious condition, such as bronchitis. Your veterinarian may also prescribe corticosteroids or antihistamines to control inflammation.

A veterinarian specializing in rabbits should be able to determine whether your rabbit has an infection or is suffering from allergies by administering a simple blood test.