



Information on myxomatosis vaccine availability in Australia

The Department of Agriculture has received enquiries from veterinarians and rabbit owners about the availability of a vaccine to provide protection against myxomatosis.

No vaccines for myxomatosis are currently registered for use in Australia, but other preventative measures can be taken. These include protecting pet rabbits from mosquitoes and fleas which spread the disease.

Answers to frequently asked questions about myxomatosis are provided below. Rabbit owners should ask their veterinarian for more information and advice.

Please note: If you live in Queensland it is illegal for you to keep a pet rabbit. Visit the [Queensland Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website](#) for more information.

Frequently asked questions

Vaccines are available in other countries, why aren't they available here?

The myxomatosis vaccines that have been available overseas are live attenuated vaccines (also known as 'modified live' vaccines). The virus in these types of vaccines may spread from vaccinated rabbits into the wild rabbit population which could allow wild rabbits to increase their immunity to myxomatosis. If this happened, there would be a dramatic increase in the number of wild rabbits in Australia, which would cause major damage to the environment and economic losses.

How would the myxomatosis virus spread from a vaccinated pet rabbit to a wild rabbit?

When a rabbit has been vaccinated with a modified live vaccine, there may be enough of the vaccine virus in their skin for it to be spread from one rabbit to another by the bites of mosquitoes and fleas.

What if I have my pet rabbit desexed?

Desexing does not prevent the spread by biting insects of vaccine virus between rabbits.

What about new vaccines?

As vaccine technology changes, new vaccines may become available that provide protection to domestic rabbits but do not have the potential to increase the immunity of wild rabbit populations to myxomatosis. The vaccine manufacturer could then apply to register the product for use in Australia. Australian Government agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, would then need to consider



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whether to approve its use. This would involve assessing any possible risk to human and animal health, and to the environment.

What can I do to protect my rabbit?

Because the virus is spread from one rabbit to another by mosquitoes and fleas, protecting rabbits from these insects by using mosquito-proof hutches and powders or sprays could help prevent myxomatosis. Your veterinarian can provide you with further advice.

Why do we still need to use myxomatosis to help control feral rabbits?

In Australia, wild rabbits cause major damage to the environment (such as soil erosion, weed invasion and competition against native species for habitat) and cost Australian agriculture [an estimated \\$206 million in annual losses](#). Wild rabbits have been implicated in broad scale land degradation, the near-extinction or extinction of small native mammals and plants and are a food source for other introduced pests such as the European red fox and the feral cat.

A proportion of the wild rabbit population has developed genetic resistance to the introduced myxoma virus. Despite this, the virus remains an important measure in keeping wild rabbits under control so that native biodiversity can be protected.