

# Myxomatosis in the US

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WHAT IS MYXOMATOSIS AND HOW DO I PROTECT MY RABBIT?



## What is Myxomatosis?

Myxomatosis is a virus. Wild rabbits can carry Myxomatosis, but do not become sick. Myxomatosis is fatal to domestic (pet) rabbits with a 99% mortality rate, and there is no treatment. Symptoms include swollen eyelids, lips, and genitals, a high fever, lethargy, and progresses to difficulty breathing, and death, within 2 weeks.

## How is Myxomatosis spread?

Mosquitoes, fleas, black flies, or fur mites bite a wild rabbit with Myxomatosis and then bite a domestic rabbit. Myxomatosis can also be spread by direct contact between infected rabbits, or indirect contact through handling a sick rabbit, then handling a healthy rabbit.

# Where is Myxomatosis in North America?

Myxomatosis cases in pet rabbits are reported in the coastal areas of Oregon, California, and Baja California, Mexico, in the territory of the brush rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) who is a reservoir of this disease. The most recent confirmed case report we know of was in July of 2022 in Los Altos Hills, Santa Clara County, CA.

So far, cases have been reported June-October and January-February (no reported cases yet in November/December or March/April/May).

## Recent Myxomatosis Case Reports

### Northern California

#### 2022

- Santa Clara County:
  - July (Los Altos Hills, reported by Dr. Hilary Stern of Exotic Pet Clinic of Santa Cruz)

#### 2020

- Santa Clara County:
  - September (Monte Sereno, reported by Dr. Hilary Stern of Animal Hospital of Soquel)
- Santa Cruz County:
  - October (Watsonville, reported by Dr. Lee at East Lake Animal Clinic)
  - September (Boulder Creek, reported by Dr. Hilary Stern of Animal Hospital of Soquel)
  - August (Felton, reported by Dr. Hilary Stern of Animal Hospital of Soquel)
  - February (Scotts Valley)
  - January (Watsonville – reported by Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter, biopsy confirmed by CAHFS)

House Rabbit Society is collecting reports of cases of Myxomatosis to add to this list. If you are a vet with a patient with Myxomatosis, or a rabbit guardian whose rabbit has been diagnosed with Myxomatosis, please email us at [hq@rabbit.org](mailto:hq@rabbit.org) to have the case added.

If you are a vet in California, please submit deceased rabbits suspected of Myxomatosis for [necropsy with a CAHFS state lab](#) (fee \$135) or report confirmed Myxomatosis cases to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA): [evet@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:evet@cdfa.ca.gov).

There have been no recent cases of Myxomatosis reported to the Washington State Department of Agriculture from 2011-2022.

## What does Myxomatosis look like?



Photo by Hilary Stern, DVM



Photo by Hilary Stern, DVM

## What are other diseases that might look like Myxomatosis?

Take your rabbit to the vet immediately if you are concerned your rabbit might have Myxomatosis, and separate them from any other rabbits in your home. Your vet can determine whether your rabbit might instead have rabbit syphilis, an upper respiratory infection, or an eye infection, all of which are treatable conditions.

## How can I protect my rabbit from Myxomatosis?

House your rabbits indoors with window screens. Rabbits live longer, healthier lives when indoors. Because myxomatosis is just one of many concerns facing rabbits who live outdoors, House Rabbit Society recommends indoor homes for rabbits as the primary preventative, along with screens on doors and windows.

If you live in an area with reported Myxomatosis cases, treat your rabbits monthly with Revolution, to prevent fleas and fur mites. Revolution is a prescription medication, available through your veterinarian. Or, treat with over-the-counter Advantage, which provides protection from fleas (but not from mosquitoes or fur mites). Be sure to give your cats and dogs flea treatment, too. Don't let your rabbit play outside if you live in an area with currently reported Myxomatosis cases.

Vectra 3D is a flea/tick/mosquito/mite/fly/lice repellent for dogs – using it on a rabbit is “off-label” use and could be harmful to your rabbit at the wrong dose. Santa Barbara rescue Bunnies Urgently Needing Shelter uses this medication as just **one of their tools** to try to keep rabbits safe. Please consult with your vet before using and get bunny-sized dose information from them.

For rabbits who must live or spend some of their time outside, protection against mosquitoes is next best bet, protecting the rabbit's play area with mosquito netting or some other barrier. Read more on the [hazards facing outdoor rabbits](#).

## Why isn't the vaccine in Europe/the UK available in the US?

The Myxomatosis vaccine available in Europe and in the UK has not been approved by the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Center for Veterinary Biologics. There is no vaccine available in the United States, and it is not legal to import the vaccine from other countries.

Hilary Stern, DVM of Santa Cruz, CA has repeatedly tried to import the European vaccine and failed. Dr. Stern said, "The FDA won't allow it because it is a live vaccine. I am not aware of any killed vaccines that are effective."

The European vaccine is for a different strain of Myxomatosis. The California (US) strain of Myxomatosis is more virulent, and it is unknown if the European vaccine would be effective against the CA strain.

## Previous Myxomatosis Reports (2019 and older)

### 2019

- Monterey County: October (95076 – reported by Monterey County and Salinas Animal Services)
- San Mateo County: September (Redwood City)
- Santa Clara County: September (San Jose 95013 – reported by CAHFS, Gilroy 95020- cases reported by Pets Vet Gilroy & Adobe Animal Hospital)
- Santa Cruz County:
  - [August](#) (Bonny Doon, Watsonville, Ben Lomond)
  - [July](#) (Santa Cruz, Boulder Creek)
- San Luis Obispo County: July
- Santa Barbara County: [July](#) (Buelton & Santa Barbara)

### 2018

- Sonoma County: September (reported by CDFA)

### 2017

- Monterey County/San Benito County: August (Aromas, reported by Dr. Hilary Stern at Animal Hospital of Soquel)
- Santa Clara County: June (Los Gatos, reported by guardian & Dr. Curt Nakamura Adobe Animal Hospital)
- Santa Barbara County: [June](#), [July](#), [August](#), [August](#)

### 2016

- San Luis Obispo: [Sept](#)
- Santa Cruz County: [July](#) & [Sept](#)
- Santa Barbara County: (reported by CDFA) July & [July](#) & [August](#)

## 2015

- Monterey County: [Sept](#)
- Santa Cruz County: [Sept](#)

## 2014

Santa Cruz County: [August](#)

### 2013

Sonoma County: October (Sebastopol – reported by guardian & Dr. Pfann, Brandner Vet)

### 2012

Monterey County (reported by AFRP's Rescue Rabbits Rock)

### Southern California

**2019** Ventura County: July (reported by CDFA)

**2017** Ventura County: August (reported by CDFA)

**2010** San Gabriel Valley (near Los Angeles): [July](#)

## Western Oregon

**2016** Marion County: [August](#) Douglas County: [July-August](#)

**2015** Polk County: [June](#)

**2010** [Western Oregon](#)

**2004** Linn & Benton counties: [July](#)

**2003** Linn & Benton counties: [July](#)

## Baja California (Mexico)

**1993** Ensenada: [Sept-Oct](#)

## More info on Myxomatosis:

- <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/exotic-and-laboratory-animals/rabbits/parasitic-diseases-of-rabbits>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myxomatosis>

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