

# BIRD & EXOTICS VETERINARIAN

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## LEAD POISONING IN RABBITS

### 1. What are the sources of lead poisoning?

Pet rabbits enjoy chewing many wooden and metallic objects around the house however many of these will contain lead or other heavy metals such as:

- Skirting boards, door frames, window sills, and walls of houses more than 30 years old are painted with lead paint in the undercoat.
- Repainted walls will still contain lead in the undercoats.
- Galvanised cages and soldering.
- Costume jewellery.
- Wooden or plastic toys which have been painted with lead-based paint.
- Rusty toys or clips used to attach food or toys to cages.
- Electrical cables may contain copper which may cause similar signs if ingested.

### 2. What are the clinical signs of heavy metal poisoning?

The most common signs are:

- Seizures
- Ataxia (poor balance and/or weakness)
- Anorexia (decreased eating)
- Falling to one side

Other signs may include:

- Head tilt
- Abdominal pain
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Red urine

### 3. Is heavy metal poisoning fatal?

Untreated, lead poisoning in rabbits can be fatal.

### 4. How is heavy metal poisoning diagnosed?

- History of exposure to sources of heavy metal and clinical signs.
- Blood testing for lead levels.
- Blood tests may also be useful to check for organ damage or to find other infections.
- Radiology (x-rays) to show the presence of metallic foreign bodies may be helpful but will not always be diagnostic.

### 5. What is the treatment for heavy metal poisoning?

- Injections of Calcium EDTA twice daily for 3-7 days may be necessary to bind the metal.
- Rabbits which have a head tilt, are falling over or seizing, should also be investigated for other diseases which may require further treatment in hospital or at home.
- Other treatment may include fluids, support feeding, antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and anti-parasite treatment.

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**For birds, reptiles, fish and small exotic mammals**  
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