Myxomatosis is a devastating viral disease of pet rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculi*). Local wild cottontail rabbits in our area naturally carry this virus. While myxomatosis causes only minor disease in cottontail rabbits, it is highly lethal to pet rabbits, and is reported to kill 96-100% of the pet bunnies it infects. The myxomatosis virus can be transmitted from one rabbit to another by direct contact, and by insects such as mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas.

Myxomatosis is unfortunately a constant presence in the coastal communities of northern California. While epidemics rarely occur, sporadic cases are common. Initial signs are seen three days after infection and can include reddened eyes with a milky discharge, lethargy, loss of appetite, and fever. Rabbits that survive this initial stage develop swelling of the eyelids, nostrils, lips, scrotum, vulva, anus, and ears. An opaque nasal discharge and labored breathing will commonly follow, leading to death within 7 to 14 days.

Unfortunately, there is no effective treatment against the myxomatosis virus once a rabbit is infected. While there is a vaccine for this disease in Europe, no similar vaccine is licensed for use in the United States. The only way to prevent myxomatosis, therefore, is to prevent exposure. To this end, it is best to have your pet live indoors. If your rabbit must live outdoors, carefully enclose its hutch with mosquito screens. Make sure that your rabbit is either indoors or behind mosquito netting during the highest mosquito activity time periods, dawn and dusk. We also recommend that all rabbits receive a monthly dose of the flea control product Advantage to prevent flea infestations.

If you see any symptoms of myxomatosis in your rabbit, make sure to isolate it from other rabbits and call us immediately at 831-475-0432.