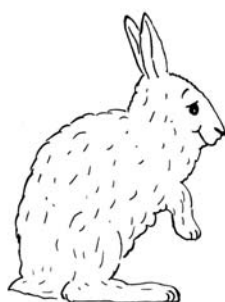


## Summer care for hutch-dwelling small animals

**L**ast summer we received a pet bereavement phone call from a lady whose elderly guinea pig had died as a result of fly strike, and she asked us to warn other owners about this awful condition. So here are some tips on the summer care of small animals.

### Fly strike

It is vital to check hutch-dwelling animals at least twice a day for signs of fly strike. While elderly animals are particularly susceptible to the terrible effects of this condition, young and healthy pets can also be at risk.



Fly strike, or blowfly strike, occurs during the summer months and is a serious condition which can affect small animals such as rabbits and guinea pigs. Fly strike is caused by flies attracted to damp fur, urine, faeces or the odour of scent glands. Flies lay their eggs on or around the pet's rear end where they hatch within hours into a seething bunch of maggots that eat into flesh, releasing toxins in the process. If you find maggots on your rabbit then take it to the vet straight away.

As animals can get ill from fly strike very quickly, it is absolutely vital to get them to a vet for immediate treatment. Vets do recognise how quickly and easily fly strike can happen, so don't worry that your vet will think your pet has been neglected in any way. Eggs can turn into maggots in just a few hours in warm weather. If a pet feels unusually wet do not assume it has just brushed against water bottle, as wetness around the rear can be a warning sign of fly strike and must be investigated thoroughly.

### Prevention is better than cure

So what else can be done to keep small pets healthy and happy outside during the warm weather?

*Diet:* Ensuring that pets receive the right amount of appropriate fresh food alongside their dried feed will help to prevent soft or runny droppings which can attract flies. It is wise to rinse any fresh food before giving it to pets, and also not to collect fresh greens from areas where there are wild rabbits or rodents, to reduce the risk of passing on parasites such as worms.

*Regular vet checks:* Having small animals regularly checked by a vet makes good sense for a variety of reasons:

- 🐾 Recommendation of products to help prevent fly strike in hot weather
- 🐾 Preventative treatment against parasites such as worms and lice
- 🐾 Regular checking of teeth since overgrown teeth can prevent proper grooming and cause difficulties with eating
- 🐾 Many diseases and medical conditions can be detected and treated early



*Placement of hutches:* It's worth remembering that fruit trees and bushes in the garden will attract a lot of flies, especially as the fruit ripens and fallen fruit rot on the ground. It may be possible to attach some very fine netting over hutches to prevent the flies from reaching the small animals. It's also important to ensure that the hutch is not placed in full sun, as the inhabitants will get too hot. Pets always need to be able to easily access cool, shady areas, whether this is inside a hutch or grazing frame.

*Good husbandry:* This is essential in keeping small pets happy and healthy. This includes regular and thorough cleaning of hutches, water bottles and feeding bowls as well as the placement of fresh bedding and hay, using a hay-rack if available.

Lastly, while it is good to encourage children to look after their pets, it is vital that the responsible adults ensure this is carried out to a good standard.