



MEDIA RELEASE

www.sydney.edu.au/vetscience

Easter Bunnies watch those mosquitoes

30th March 2010

With the Easter Bunny preparing for his annual world egg deliveries, pet rabbit owners are reminded this Easter to ensure their pet bunny is up-to-date with vaccinations.

Rabbits are becoming increasingly popular as pets and veterinarians from the Sydney University Teaching Hospital urge all rabbit owners to ensure they are keeping up regular vet checks as well as their annual Rabbit Calicivirus vaccination.

Jessica Chan and delightful pet rabbit Honey Bunny, recently attended the University Teaching Hospital's 'Free Pet Health Check' opportunity as part of the celebrations around the opening of its new 24-hour, seven-day-a-week emergency veterinary service, SAVES. Honey Bunny was dressed in her finest pink pyjamas as part of the 'Best Pet in Pyjamas' competition and after receiving a clean bill of health was given her annual Calicivirus injection by Head of Small Animal Medicine, Dr Vanessa Barrs.

Pet rabbit owners are urged to have their bunny vaccinated against Rabbit Calicivirus which is incurable and fatal once contracted. The virus infiltrates the liver and other internal organs causing the rabbit to bleed spontaneously and in some cases respiratory failure.

Symptoms pet rabbit owners should be aware of include a fever, the bunny becoming depressed and quiet, not eating and there may be some blood present however most rabbits will not show any external signs of having the Calicivirus.

Calicivirus is spread by rabbit to rabbit contact, contaminated food and insects such as flies, mosquitoes and fleas. Preventative measures such as keeping pet bunnies in an insect proof enclosure will reduce the exposure to insects and minimise contact the bunny may have with wild rabbits. Since Myxomatosis is spread the same way, this will help protect pet bunnies from contracting it as well.

Rabbits over 12weeks old require an initial vaccination followed by annual boosters for adequate protection against this disease. Bunnies which are vaccinated under 12weeks will require a second booster followed by the annual vaccinations.

The origins of the Easter Bunny as an Easter icon were first recorded in German literature in the 1600s. It is thought the symbol of rabbits, hares and of course Easter eggs were selected as they were extreme representations of fertility back in ancient times. The extreme fertility of rabbits became very apparent after their introduction from Europe to Australia in the late 1850s made them a major environmental pest after their population exploded.

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) released a series of biological controls into Australia including Myxomatosis and Rabbit Calicivirus to control the prolific rabbit populations.

****END****

Media contact:

Liana Carroll

Phone: (02) 9351 5074

Email: vsf.media@sydney.edu.au