

## **Why are we changing our North American rabbit health reports?**

We have recently moved all of our testing to our health monitoring lab in Desio, Italy. Our ultimate goal is to align all of our rabbit testing to meet FELASA guidelines and to have a consistent format with our other species health monitoring reports. In our effort to continually implement the 3R principles, we will no longer sacrifice animals for health monitoring. We have transitioned to collecting various non-sacrificial samples including fur swabs, fur plucks, oral swabs, dried blood spots and feces for evaluation. In addition, we have more than doubled our sample size for each NA rabbit location to ensure accuracy of our health reporting data.

- Currently, rabbits in NA are not “SPF” and will be referred to as “Conventional.”
- Long standing population has been positive for the following organisms for many years:
  - > *Bordetella bronchiseptica*
  - > *Eimeria* spp (intestinal coccidia only)

### ***Bordetella bronchiseptica***

What is it?

- Common bacteria found in the upper respiratory tracts of many animal species including rabbits

Clinical Significance

- Typically asymptomatic in rabbits, but can lead to mild upper respiratory symptoms

Transmission

- Rabbits are often asymptomatic carriers and should not be co-housed with other species
- Can be transmitted via fine particle aerosol, fomites, or direct contact with nasal secretions of infected animals

Risks to Other Species

- Can cause serious clinical illness in guinea pigs
- Can infect rats, mice, hamsters and cotton rats

### **Current status**

- Present in all NA rabbit buildings for many years
- 36% - 52% culture-positive prevalence
- Typically no clinical impacts

### **Rabbit Coccidiosis or *Eimeria* spp.**

What is it?

- > Single-celled protozoal parasite with multi-stage life cycle
- > At least 14 species of the genus *Eimeria*
- > Two types of coccidiosis:
  - Intestinal (*E. perforans*, *E. magna*, *E. media*, *E. irresidua*, *E. intestinalis* and more)
  - Hepatic (*E. stiedae*) \*EXCLUDED ORGANISM\*

## ***Rabbit Coccidiosis or Eimeria spp.***

### Clinical Significance

- > Animals aged 4-14 weeks are most susceptible, especially after weaning at 6 weeks
- > Mild to severe diarrhea
- > Clinical illness can return if animals are stressed, immunosuppressed or husbandry conditions change

### Transmission

- > Transmission via ingestion of infectious sporulated oocysts shed in feces (fecal-oral) or contaminated food/water

### Risks to Other Species

- > *Eimeria* are species-specific

## **Current *Eimeria spp.* Status**

- Intestinal coccidia are present in all NA rabbit buildings
- All NA rabbit buildings are free of hepatic coccidia
- Since March 2025, we have been administering a daily, medicated diet containing the coccidiostat diclazuril to reduce the incidence of intestinal coccidiosis in our Texter Mountain rabbit colonies
- The medicated diet has proven to:
  - > Reduce the incidence and severity of coccidia gastrointestinal infections
  - > Minimize clinical signs, such as stress-induced diarrhea, especially during weaning and transport
  - > Improve overall animal health and welfare
- Diclazuril clears within 24 hours and should not impact research studies
- For timed pregnant females, there are no known adverse effects or outcomes for either the does or kits when exposed to this treatment

## **References**

Fox J.G., Anderson, L.C., Otto, G.M., Pritchett-Corning, K.R., & Whary, M.T. (2015). *Laboratory Animal Medicine*. Elsevier: Academic Press.

