



Heat and Your Rabbit

Rabbits do not do well in high temperature settings. During the summer we must think of how our pets will survive the heat. Many rabbits, including house rabbits die each summer of heat-related stress. A rabbit's optimal air temperature is between 50°F and 70°F. Many days in the summer have air temperatures approaching 80°F to 95°F. For rabbits outside in a hutch (even in a shady area) or inside a house without air conditioning, this can be a death sentence. Take preventative measures and consult your veterinarian if necessary. Have a safe and cool summer. Your rabbit will thank you!

■ How to prevent overheating

First and most important, always make sure your rabbit has plenty of fresh cool water available.

If air conditioning is not an option, try a fan strategically placed so the rabbit cannot be injured (e.g. chewing the cord).

When it is dangerously hot, immerse a light cloth in cool water and hang it over the side of the cage or pen. Then, have the fan blow on the cloth; this cools the air more than the fan alone.

Another idea is to freeze a milk jug full of water and place it in a large bowl in the rabbit's room or cage. Do not use 2-liter bottles as they may fall on the rabbit or roll away when the rabbit lies next to it. Use the bowl around the milk jug to keep the puddles of condensation off the rabbit. Most rabbits will soon lie down with the bodies pressed against the cold bowl. The frozen milk jugs usually last about 8-10 hours depending on the air temperature.

If your rabbit does not lie next to the frozen bowl, try a ceramic or marble tile (large enough for him to rest on) placed in the cage. These can be frozen to keep them cool longer. The tiles are inexpensive and can be purchased at a local home-improvement store.

■ How to identify an overheated rabbit

If preventative measures do not work and your rabbit appears to be overheated, this can be an emergency!

The best way to tell if your rabbit is overheated is to take his temperature. The normal rectal temperature of a rabbit is 100°F to 103°F.

To take the temperature hold the rabbit on his back like a baby and have another person insert the thermometer one inch into the rectum. If using a glass thermometer leave it in for approximately one minute. Digital thermometers usually take less time, are safer, and are easier to use.

If you need help learning how to take your rabbit's temperature, ask your veterinarian to show you how.

Watch your rabbit for panting or lethargy or feeling warm to the touch. If your rabbit's temperature is above the normal range consult your veterinarian.

■ How to cool an overheated rabbit

If you cannot get to the veterinary hospital in a timely manner, there are some home procedures you can employ until your rabbit can be examined.

Lightly spritz your rabbit with a spray bottle of water. Be careful not to drench your rabbit because this will mat the hair and hold in the body heat. Try pushing the hair against the grain with one hand and spritzing the skin with the other. Avoid spraying the rabbit in the face or ears.

To cool the ears, place a cloth in cool water (not cold) and dab the ears.

If your rabbit is severely overheated you may try a cool water bath. Do not place your rabbit completely under water. Be careful that your rabbit does not struggle and injure himself during any of these procedures. If you are unable to do any of these procedures, please take your pet to your rabbit-knowledgeable veterinarian for care. Overheating can be fatal to your rabbit.