

Thymomas in Rabbits

I recently read a retrospective article on thymoma in rabbits written by several veterinarians at University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna, Austria. I want to share some of the highlights of the article with you.

Thymomas are tumors arising from the thymus gland which is located in the chest in the space in front (anterior) of the heart. The symptoms rabbits can exhibit can include difficulty breathing (dyspnea), exercise intolerance (tire easily) and bilateral (both) exophthalmus (bulging eyes). They can also show decreased appetite (especially if having trouble breathing), coughing and prolapsed (prominent) third eyelids. These symptoms can occur suddenly or gradually.

Diagnosis is based on clinical symptoms and diagnostic imaging results (blood testing is generally not helpful although some rabbits may have elevated lymphocytes on a complete blood count). On thoracic (chest) x-rays you will see that the trachea can be pushed up toward the rabbit's back by the mass and the edge of the heart that is nearest the head will be difficult to see because this is where the mass is located. Fine needle aspirates of the mass (done under sedation) can be performed to get confirmation of the diagnosis.

Treatment for thymoma involves surgical removal with radiation therapy if removal is not complete or if the rabbit is not a good surgical candidate. Unfortunately death is the most common surgical complication seen. Radiation has the risk of suppressing the immune system as does conservative therapy with prednisolone.

If you would like to read more about this contact our office and we will be happy to send you a copy of the article that was printed in the March/April edition of JAAHA.