

Alert on Topical Flea Products

By Jeffrey R. Jenkins, DVM

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Medical Alert: Problems Reported with New Topical Flea Products

Our hospital has become aware of problems with one of the new topical flea products, Frontline, marketed through veterinarians by Rhone Merieux Inc. To date, we have consulted with veterinarians who have prescribed Frontline which resulted in the death of three rabbits; another rabbit has been successfully treated for severe seizures it developed after Frontline was applied.

The active ingredient in Frontline is not supposed to cross into the central nervous system of mammals, and has proven to be safe for dogs and cats. It kills both fleas and ticks, and is difficult to wash off.

However, it is important to note that use of this product on rabbits is an "off label use" and has never been recommended or approved by the manufacturer. (This is the case with most pharmaceuticals used in rabbits.)

Representatives of Rhone Merieux Inc. admit they have received other reports of "adverse reactions" to Frontline when used on rabbits, but would not go so far as to say that they knew if other rabbits had died. They went on to say that they strongly recommend Frontline NOT be used on rabbits or other exotic species.

In addition we have heard an anecdotal report (someone had a friend whose neighbor told them of a rabbit that developed gastrointestinal upset after licking a large volume of Advantage off another rabbit just after it was applied). Before recommending Advantage for our clients' rabbits, our hospital did an in-depth literature search, consulted with the manufacturer (Bayer) and tested the product on many un-owned rabbits to make certain that the product was safe. Gastrointestinal upset has been reported in cats who lick a large volume of the product off another animal.

We recommend that multiple pet households separate rabbits or rabbits and cats for 12 hours after Advantage has been applied so the product can disperse on the animal's coat before another animal has the opportunity to groom the treated rabbit.

The reason that these products are sold by prescription only is that there is some risk involved with their use. It is important for the veterinarian prescribing the product to understand those risks and in this case, those risks specific to rabbits, and be able to explain those risks.

Should you have questions about the use of a prescription product or should you experience a problem during the time your rabbit is taking a prescription medication, it is important for you to contact your veterinarian immediately.