



## **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease**

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### **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease**

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is a lethal disease caused by a calicivirus called RHDV. This virus has been present in Europe and Australia for decades, but until recently was not found in the United States. An outbreak of rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus type 2 (RHDV2) that began in New Mexico in March 2020 has spread rapidly across the country. This outbreak is killing domestic rabbits as well as wild cottontails and hares.

### **Symptoms of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease**

Symptoms of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease vary depending on how quickly the disease progresses. Rabbits with the acute form of the disease are often found dead with no prior symptoms. Other rabbits develop fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, breathing difficulties, blue colored lips, and bleeding from body cavities. If your rabbit is showing signs of illness and you are concerned, please contact a rabbit-savvy veterinarian immediately. Reports estimate that 75% of unvaccinated domestic rabbits that contract this disease will die from it.

### **Disease Transmission**

RHDV2 is stable in the environment and can persist for months in carcasses and on fabric. It is easily spread among rabbits, either by direct contact or by contaminated fomites such as hands, dishes, towels, and cages. The virus can also be spread by biting insects such as mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, and biting flies. Since the virus is present in wild rabbit populations it can be tracked into a home on shoes or other objects that are exposed to dirt. While indoor only rabbits are less likely to get Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease than are rabbits that live outdoors, reports from Europe show that even indoor-only rabbits can contract the disease.

### **Vaccination**

The vaccine against Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease currently available in the United States is called Medgene RHDV2. This vaccine is safe for rabbits as young as 4 weeks old. The first time this vaccine is given a booster is needed after 3 weeks; after that, yearly boosters are needed to maintain immunity. Medgene RHDV2 is safe and effective, and the only reported side effect is a temporary bump at the site of injection.

## **Other Methods of Prevention**

Since no vaccine is 100% protective, we recommend that you take measures to prevent your rabbits from coming into contact with RHDV2. Keep your rabbits strictly indoors, and remove your shoes and wash your hands when you enter your home. Keep all rabbits on a rabbit-safe monthly flea preventative such as Advantage® II or Revolution®. If you bring a new rabbit into your home, quarantine it for at least 9 days and have it vaccinated at the soonest opportunity. Bleach diluted 1:10 in water is an effective disinfectant against RHDV2, as are Virkon™ S and Rescue™. If you see dead or dying rabbits outdoors do not touch them, but call the California Department of Food and Agriculture (for domesticated / pet rabbits) at (209) 491-9350 or the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (for cottontail rabbits or hares) at (916) 358-2790.

## **Additional Resources**

More information about RHD is available from the California Department of Food and Agriculture at <[https.cdfa.ca.gov](https://cdfa.ca.gov)> and on the House Rabbit Society's website at <<https://rabbit.org>>.