

# Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2



## Guidance for Commercial Rabbit Breeders and Pet Rabbit Owners



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### What is Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease?

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2 (RHDV2) is a highly lethal infectious disease of all domestic and wild rabbits. It is not a human health concern. RHDV2 is transmitted by infected rabbits in their urine, feces, and respiratory secretions and is spread via direct contact with infected wild or domestic rabbits and through indirect contact with objects potentially contaminated with the virus (e.g., food, bedding, water, cages, etc.). The virus may remain infectious for months on surfaces, tools, bedding, etc. but is inactivated by a 10% bleach solution. There is no known effective treatment for RHDV2.

### Distribution

RHDV2 has been diagnosed in domestic rabbits in various states, including Ohio (2018), Washington (2019), and New York (2020). It was also been detected in wild rabbits in the southwestern U.S. and Mexico in 2020.



### Biosecurity Recommendations

- Wash hands before and after handling or caring for rabbits and between groups.
- Clean and disinfect feeders and other equipment daily.
  - \* Remove organic debris with soap and water, rinse well, allow to dry, spray with or submerge in a 10% bleach solution for at least 10 minutes, rinse well, and let dry before re-use.
- House rabbits indoors if possible.
- If housed outdoors, use hutches or elevated cages.
- Remove manure and other debris (litter, hay, etc.) that accumulates under the cages regularly.
  - \* Double-bag and dispose in a landfill.
- Prevent contact with wild rabbits.
- Do not allow rabbits to graze on the lawn.
- Do not collect outdoor forage and browse to feed rabbits.
  - \* Treats can include store-bought raw vegetables.
- Avoid contact with other pet rabbits.
  - \* Shower and change clothes if you have handled dead or live wild rabbits or domestic rabbits owned by someone else before handling your own rabbits.
- Do not allow visitors who own rabbits.
- Assess the health status of the rabbitry from which you purchase animals by inquiring about recent mortalities, recent additions to the population, any observed signs of illness, etc.
- Maintain a separate isolation/quarantine location and equipment for newly acquired animals, animals returning from a show, and sick animals.
  - \* Quarantine new animals for at least 30 days.
- Disinfect any new equipment or caging/equipment that is acquired from another rabbitry.
- Source hay from unaffected areas.
- Minimize interactions between flies, rats, cats, dogs, birds, etc. that can move the virus between rabbits.

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### Clinical Signs

- Infected rabbits often die suddenly with no outward signs of illness.
- Infected animals may show signs of fever, lack of appetite, lethargy, muscle spasms, difficulty breathing, blue-tinged lips, and may bleed from various body cavities.
- Isolate sick domestic rabbits immediately to prevent contact with other rabbits.
  - \* Call your veterinarian as soon as possible if you notice signs of illness in your rabbit.
  - \* Handle healthy animals first and sick animals last to minimize transfer of disease.
- Report all unusual mass morbidity (sickness) or mortality (death) events to your local licensed veterinarian.

### Control

- At this time, there is no RHDV2 vaccine available for use in domestic rabbits in Virginia.
- Do not release domestic rabbits into the wild.
  - \* This practice is illegal and can spread disease.

### Disinfection Protocol

- Remove all organic debris by scrubbing tools, cages, food bowls, etc. with soap and detergent, rinse, and dry.
- Use a 10% bleach (sodium hypochlorite) solution.
  - \* Mix 1/2 cup 6% or 8.25% household bleach in 1 gallon of water.
- Ensure contact time is at least 10 minutes.
- Wear gloves and eye protection when mixing the solution and work in a well-ventilated area.

### Additional Resources

- **Center for Food Security & Public Health (general facts):**  
[http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit\\_hemorrhagic\\_disease.pdf](http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit_hemorrhagic_disease.pdf)
- **USDA (general facts):** [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal\\_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf)
- **USDA (cleaning and disinfection procedures):**  
[https://www.tahc.texas.gov/animal\\_health/rabbits/USDA\\_CandDofRHDV2.pdf](https://www.tahc.texas.gov/animal_health/rabbits/USDA_CandDofRHDV2.pdf)

