



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Animal Industries and Consumer Services*

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NOTICE FROM THE STATE VETERINARIAN

Dear Maryland Veterinarian or Rabbit Owner:

Please see attached information on an emerging rabbit disease in the United States, RHDV2. This disease has not been detected in Maryland at this time. Please review the information provided here and **report any suspicious cases immediately** by contacting the Maryland Department of Agriculture by calling 410-841-5810 or emailing animalhealth.mda@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Odian, DVM
State Veterinarian

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 (RHDV2) in the United States

In February 2020, animal health officials detected rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2 (RHDV2) for the third time in the United States, since 2018. Since that detection, RHDV2 has spread to multiple states across the Southwest. RHDV2 does not impact human health or other animals. There are no confirmed cases of RHDV2 in Maryland at this time. **Veterinarians, and rabbit owners are asked to be on the lookout for this disease, report any suspect cases, and to take precautions to prevent the introduction or spread of RHDV2 by calling 410-841-5810 or emailing animalhealth.mda@maryland.gov.**

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 is a highly contagious Calicivirus and is considered a foreign animal disease in the United States (reportable). It was first detected in North America in 2018 in British Columbia, Canada and in Washington State. Sporadic cases in Ohio and New York have also been reported. Unlike other rabbit hemorrhagic disease viruses, it affects both domestic and wild rabbits. As of October 7, 2020, Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV2) has been confirmed in 11 US States since 2018 (Ohio, Washington, New York, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, California, Utah and Florida), and is currently found in 7 states (New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, California, and Utah) (USDA APHIS (c), FDACs). Signs in captive, feral and wild rabbits include loss of appetite, fever, lethargy, labored breathing, seizures, and blood around orifices (photo), but in most rabbits sudden death is the only indication of RHDV2. Rabbit owners, breeders, veterinarians, wildlife rehabilitators, and biologists should maintain strict biosecurity practices and contact the Maryland Department of Agriculture if RHDV2 cases are suspected.

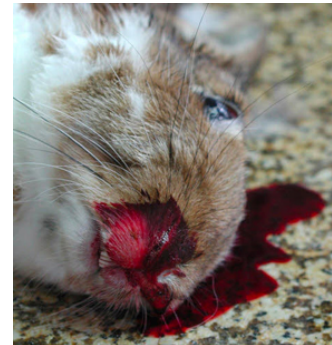


Photo credit: Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine

How RHDV2 Spreads

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS (b)) has indicated the RHDV2 virus can be spread through direct contact or exposure to an infected rabbit's excretions or blood. The virus can also survive and spread from carcasses, food, water, and any contaminated materials. People can spread the virus indirectly by carrying it on their clothing and shoes. The virus is resistant to extreme temperatures.

Treatment and Prevention

There is currently no cure for rabbits infected with RHDV2 or any of the fatal RHDV viruses (USDA APHIS (a)). Diagnosis by an accredited veterinarian is recommended for rabbits showing signs of RHDV infection. Sick rabbits should be isolated immediately to prevent contact with other rabbits.

There currently are no U.S. licensed vaccines for RHDV2. The two killed EU unlicensed vaccines are being allowed for emergency use in States with confirmed cases of

RHDV2 and only under the direction of the State Animal Health Officials. If a state has confirmed cases, veterinarians can request permission to use the vaccine from the State Veterinarian by emailing animalhealth.mda@maryland.gov. Special Permit applications for importation will only be considered with the approval of the State Veterinarian.

Rabbit Exhibitions

At this time, rabbit exhibitions are allowed to be held in Maryland, and rabbits are not required to have a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection to attend an exhibition. Biosecurity practices should be followed before, during and after exhibitions to minimize the chance of infection and spread of RHDV2, as well as any other rabbit disease.

Recommended Biosecurity Practices for Rabbit Owners

Rabbit breeders or growers who purchase live rabbits should review their biosecurity measures and practices and take steps to address potential gaps. Biosecurity refers to everything that's done to keep diseases and the pathogens that carry them – viruses, bacteria, fungi, parasites and other microorganisms – away from domestic animals, property, and people (<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/>).

The biosecurity actions below are recommended by USDA APHIS (b) to significantly reduce the chance of RHDV2 or other contagious diseases affecting domestic rabbits.

- Do not allow pet or wild rabbits to have contact with your rabbits or gain entry to the facility or home.
- Do not allow visitors in rabbitries or let them handle pet rabbits without protective clothing (including coveralls, shoe covers, hair covering, and gloves).
- Always wash hands with warm soapy water before entering your rabbit area, after removing protective clothing and before leaving the rabbit area.
- Do not introduce new rabbits from unknown or untrusted sources. Do not add rabbits to your rabbitry from animal shelters or other types of rescue operations.
- If you bring outside rabbits into your facility or home, keep them separated from your existing rabbits for at least 30 days. Use separate equipment for newly acquired or sick rabbits to avoid spreading disease.
- Sanitize all equipment and cages moved on or off premises before they are returned to the rabbitry. We recommend disinfecting with 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide mixed with water.
- Establish a working relationship with a veterinarian to review biosecurity practices for identification and closure of possible gaps.

General Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) Contaminated Premises

If your rabbitry is found to be infected with RHDV, the USDA has provided detailed recommendations for cleaning and disinfection to prevent the reintroduction of the virus to your operation, or the spread of the virus to other rabbit premises or the wild. See: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv-cleaning-guidance.pdf

Report Suspicious Cases

Rabbit owners who have questions about this disease should contact their veterinarian. When found, this disease must be reported to the World Organization for Animal Health; veterinarians should immediately contact the Maryland Department of Agriculture by calling 410-841-5810 or email animalhealth.mda@maryland.gov.

More Information

For detailed information on RHDV2 in domestic and feral (escaped, released domestic rabbits), see: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv2.pdf.

Additional current information on RHDV2 recommended biosecurity practices and vaccines can be found on the USDA webpage here: [United States Department of Agriculture APHIS](#).

The U.S. Department of Interior / National Wildlife Health Center maintains an updated national map for ongoing wildlife morbidity and mortality events. For additional wildlife disease information visit: <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/nwhc>.

Sources

USDA, APHIS (a), Emerging Risk Notice, July 2020, Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus, Serotype 2, https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv2.pdf

USDA APHIS (b), Factsheet, June 2020, Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease, https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf

USDA APHIS (c), RHDV2 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/faq-rhd-vaccine.pdf

FDACS, <https://www.fdacs.gov/content/download/91807/file/RHD2Website20210111ADAcheck.pdf>

USDA APHIS (d), General Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) Contaminated Premises https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv-cleaning-guidance.pdf

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/training-and-development/video-gallery/2020/rhdv2-overview>