



Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) Frequently Asked Questions

What will happen if RHD is diagnosed in my area?

RHD is a foreign animal disease with potentially devastating effects on the health of domestic and wild rabbits. Because of its potential impact on the food supply in some states and countries, it is a disease that triggers state, federal and international regulatory action. Unfortunately, RHD has already spread to many U.S. states and has occurred in both wild and domestic rabbits, making regulatory disease control rather than eradication strategies more likely if diagnosed in your area.

Disease control strategies contain many of the same elements as virus eradication strategies including colony quarantines to reduce movement of carrier animals, encouraging owners to practice good biosecurity – those actions that reduce the likelihood of virus getting to their rabbits, and testing rabbits that die suddenly for RHD to better understand and reduce the risk of spread. While euthanizing infected or exposed rabbits is a rapid way to stop RHD virus (RHDV) replication and spread, and prevents “carrier” rabbits, a control program as opposed to an eradication program uses euthanasia sparingly and primarily in unique cases where the virus threatens protected populations of rabbits.

For more information on the disease or biosecurity go to: www.cdfa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Animal_Health/

Is there a vaccine available for RHD?

Currently, there is no licensed vaccine for RHDV available in the United States (U.S.). Vaccine manufacturers must work with USDA to get their RHDV vaccine licensed, so that it can be evaluated for safety, purity and efficacy. However, in cases of emergency when there is no licensed vaccine but a state has a confirmed case of RHD, private veterinarians can apply for a special conditional license to import the vaccine with State Veterinarian (CDFA) approval.

Two examples of vaccines for RDHV2 licensed in other countries are: ERAVAC – Laboratorios Hipra (Spain) and FILAVAC – Filavie (France). Veterinarians are encouraged to contact the USDA Center for Veterinary Biologics at (515) 337-6100 or e-mail cvb@usda.gov for more information. CDFA will approve conditional requests in California from California licensed veterinarians. Veterinarians may e-mail AHBFeedback@cdfa.ca.gov to obtain information on how to obtain a permit to import vaccine. Rabbit owners should speak with their veterinarian to discuss the pros and cons of vaccination.

What is CDFA doing to protect rabbits from infection?

The most important elements of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)’s response will be outreach to increase awareness of the disease and biosecurity knowledge, restriction of the movement of rabbits from infected states, and quarantine of confirmed infected and exposed domestic rabbits to restrict movement of carrier animals. CDFA is working with its partners at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to protect the health of domestic rabbits as well as wild rabbits that may include endangered or other at-risk species.

How long can RHD persist in the environment?

The virus can survive for long periods outside the host. Environmental temperature and protection by organic material are important factors in the survival of the virus. Viable virus has been detected for as long as 105 days on environmental surfaces at room temperature, has been found in decaying tissue of infected carcasses for up to 90 days, and may persist in chilled or frozen rabbit meat. It also survives freeze-thaw cycles.

Can rabbits that have been exposed and recover or never become ill become carriers of the virus for life?

Exposure to a virus does not mean infected with a virus. Some rabbits will just be exposed; others will be exposed and become infected and either die or recover. This disease is very contagious so most rabbits exposed will become infected. The strain of RHDV2 circulating in the southwestern U.S. is killing about 90% of infected rabbits. Surviving rabbits will develop antibodies to the virus and become resistant to related calicivirus strains for an unknown amount of time. Rabbits surviving infection can be carriers of virus for up to 2 months.



To report dead wild rabbits or hares contact:

CDFW Wildlife Investigations Lab - (916) 358-2790

or report online at:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Laboratories/Wildlife-Investigations/Monitoring/Mortality-Report>

To report dead domestic rabbits contact the CDFA
Animal Health Branch.

Consult your private veterinarian if your rabbit is sick.

Animal Health and Food Safety Services

Animal Health Branch

Headquarters - (916) 900-5002

Redding District - (530) 225-2140

Modesto District - (209) 491-9350

Tulare District - (559) 685-3500

Ontario District - (909) 947-4462

USDA-APHIS-VS - (916) 854-3950 or (877) 741-3690

For more information about RHD and
biosecurity, visit:

https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Animal_Health/