

# Animal health update: Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2

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On June 10, 2022, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) reported two cases of rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus - 2 (RHDV2) in a household of domestic companion rabbits in Lambton County. Ongoing epidemiological work, including strain typing, is being performed. This virus is extremely contagious to domestic and wild rabbits and hares and may have a significant mortality rate. This is the first time RHDV2 has been reported in Ontario.

**If you have any concerns regarding the health status of your rabbits, contact your veterinarian immediately.**

RHDV2 is an Immediately Notifiable Hazard to the Office of the Chief Veterinarian for Ontario under the *Animal Health Act, 2009* and to the CFIA under the *Health for Animals Act*. Although areas of southwest British Columbia have been reporting positive cases of RHDV2 since 2018, there have only been sporadic cases reported in pet rabbits in Canada to date and no cases have been detected in Ontario previously.

RHDV2 affects rabbits of virtually all ages, with domestic rabbits appearing highly susceptible. This disease can display itself in many different forms including rabbits or hares found dead, with or without the characteristic bleeding that gives the disease its name; signs of liver failure such as jaundice, neurological signs, frothing discharge from the nose and bleeding before dying. Some rabbits do not show clinical signs of infection but will be long term carriers and may serve as sources of the infection for other rabbits.

There is no commercially approved vaccine available in Canada. Veterinarians can request access to these products through the Canadian Centre for Veterinary Biologics - Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Rabbits will require yearly boosters to maintain effective immunity.

The best prevention besides vaccination is strong biosecurity practices.

**Key steps** to reduce the risk of infection in a **companion rabbit** premises include:

- Isolating all live rabbit introductions to your home or rabbitry and monitoring them for signs of illness for at least 30 days prior to introduction to other rabbits;
- avoiding contact between yourself and your rabbits with wild rabbits;
- ensuring your rabbits are regularly treated with flea and tick preventatives and have an effective fly control program;
- ensuring feed is clean and dry and kept away from wildlife and pests, as the virus may also move in feed and water;
- sourcing hay used as feed from an RHDV2-free jurisdiction or making sure it was harvested and baled more than 8 months ago;

- working with your veterinarian for regular health checks;
- cleaning and disinfecting all equipment frequently;
- changing clothing and footwear if you visit locations with other domestic rabbits or go on hikes in natural areas, and showering and washing hair prior to having contact with your rabbits again;
- requiring that any visitors to your rabbitry wear protective clothing, hairnets, gloves and shoe covers; and
- washing your hands prior to working with your rabbits and after removing your protective clothing.

**Key steps** to reduce the risk of infection in a **commercial rabbit** premises include:

- Ensuring adequate training of farm and company personnel in biosecurity and disease prevention;
- Requiring all people entering rabbit areas, including farmers, employees, friends and family and service providers to put on clean footwear, protective clothing and follow all biosecurity protocols each time a premise is entered;
- Minimizing visits to other rabbit production sites and avoiding any co-mingling of rabbits from different places and contact with outside/wild rabbits;
- Avoiding exchanging and sharing equipment with other rabbit production sites;
- Ensuring all vehicles and farm equipment that access the barn vicinity are properly washed, disinfected and thoroughly dried before use;
- Ensuring that laneways are restricted and secured;
- Preventing wild bird and rodent entry to rabbit facilities; and
- Ensuring that bedding, feed and water is free of contaminants (feces from wild animals, etc.).

All commercial and private rabbit owners should monitor their flocks for illness and deaths and track flock feed and water consumption. Watch for any clinical signs of disease, such as depression, decreased appetite or jaundice, and ensure sick rabbits are examined by a veterinarian. All sudden deaths should be submitted to a veterinary laboratory for diagnostic testing.

Wildlife rehabilitators should contact their local Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry office for direction, or contact the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative at [1-866-673-4781](tel:1-866-673-4781).

Additional information is available at:

- [CFIA - Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2](#)
- [USDA-APHIS Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease](#)