



July 28, 2020

Greetings:

You are receiving this notification because the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (Agency) understands that you may own, breed, exhibit, buy or sell rabbits in Vermont, and we want to make you aware of an important issue that could impact your livelihood or hobby. The Agency has been monitoring with concern the outbreak of rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHDV2) in the Southwest U.S. and urges you to take precautions to prevent this highly contagious disease from infecting rabbits in your care and others in our state.

Since March of this year, RHDV2, caused by a calicivirus, has led to the deaths of many wild and domestic rabbits in other states. Rabbits and jackrabbits infected with this exotic calicivirus may die so quickly that the clinical signs associated with RHDV2, including fever, inappetence, and neurologic and respiratory abnormalities, are not observed. RHDV2 is spread by direct contact between rabbits; through contact with rabbit blood or other excretions; or indirectly when caretakers carry the virus between rabbits on shared equipment, clothing, cages, feed, bedding and other fomites. Almost all rabbits infected with the virus will die from it, and a vaccine is not readily available. Because of the severity of this disease and our current inability to protect rabbits through vaccination, Vermont rabbit owners and caretakers must practice strict biosecurity at all times when working with rabbits to protect them from RHDV2 and other contagious diseases. These measures include:

- Do not acquire rabbits from regions of the country with positive cases of RHDV2. A map of infected areas can be found here: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd>.
- Do not allow pet or wild rabbits to have contact with your rabbits or gain entry to the facility or home. If you must bring outside rabbits into your facility or home, keep them separated from your existing rabbits for at least 30 days and monitor closely for signs of disease. Use separate equipment for newly acquired or sick rabbits to avoid spreading disease.
- 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 or from those that cannot confirm the rabbit's health status for 30 days prior to acquisition.



- Sanitize all equipment and cages moved on or off premises before they are returned to the rabbit housing area. We recommend disinfecting with 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide mixed with water.
- Establish a working relationship with a veterinarian to review your biosecurity practices for identification and closure of possible gaps.
- Report all cases of rapid and/or unexplained rabbit death to your veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian will then follow up with the appropriate state or animal health official if warranted.

RHDV2 does not pose a food safety concern and is not transmissible to people. However, strict biosecurity practices should be maintained when handling or processing rabbit carcasses to prevent accidental spread, and all rabbit meat should be thoroughly cooked prior to consumption.

To ensure that the free movement of rabbits into and within Vermont can continue to occur, it is imperative that each Vermonter who owns or works with rabbits is diligent and takes all necessary precautions to prevent an introduction of this highly contagious virus. Please refer to the enclosed RHDV2 USDA fact sheet and visit the Agency's website: <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/animal-health/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease> for more information about this disease outbreak. Return to the website periodically as information there will be updated as the situation evolves. If you would like to be added to the Agency's rabbit industry distribution list to receive electronic updates on this issue, please contact me at Kristin.haas@vermont.gov with that request. You may direct general questions to the Agency at (802)828-2421.

Sincerely,



Kristin M. Haas, DVM

Vermont State Veterinarian

