



## **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2) Biosecurity Guidance Document**

**This document was developed by a multi-agency working group chaired by members of the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials. It has been customized to the needs of Vermont and was last updated on July 29, 2020. Further updates will be made as needed to remain pertinent during this evolving situation.**

### **Biosecurity for Rabbit Owners**

Although Vermont is not currently impacted by RHDV2, establishing good biosecurity practices to prevent an introduction of this disease and others is the best way to protect the health of your rabbits. Rabbit owners and commercial operations should work with their veterinarian to identify their biosecurity risk factors and consider developing biosecurity plans that capture these, establish best practices and make considerations for vaccination or other tools for disease prevention and control. Customized business plans may vary throughout Vermont based on geographic location, presence of infection in wildlife or access to vaccine. Key areas recommend for inclusion in your biosecurity plan are as follows:

- **Human Best Practices**

- Have indoor and outdoor footwear; do not wear outdoor shoes indoors and vice versa.
- Wash hands before and after handling or caring for rabbits and between groups.
- Do not allow visitors who also have rabbits to interact with your rabbits.
- Do not handle others' rabbits.
- Handle sick rabbits last when providing routine care.
- Follow disposal guidance for dead rabbits.

- **“Line of Separation” and “Perimeter buffer area”**

- Commercial operations may apply these concepts during periods of heightened risk, especially in areas where RHDV has affected wild rabbits.
- This refers to the need to maintain separation between domestic and wild rabbits. You likely have seen horse or cattle pastures that are double fenced, for instance. This is to prevent livestock in adjacent pastures from touching noses and spreading disease. Domestic rabbits should be segregated from contact with wild species in the same manner to protect both populations. Consider a second perimeter fence or other barrier around areas where domestic rabbit hutches or housing is located.

- **Housing**

- Keep rabbits inside if possible on an impermeable surface.
- If rabbits are housed outdoors, consider the following:
  - Double fence to avoid direct contact with wildlife.

- Prevent direct or indirect contact with wild rabbits.
  - House rabbits in hutches or cages off the ground.
  - Do not use forage, tree branches or grass for bedding from areas with infected wildlife.
- **Isolate new rabbits or rabbits returning from a show** (refer to RHDV2 Shows and Exhibitions Guidance Document))
  - Keep rabbits in separate area for 30 days before allowing contact with your colony.
  - Be aware of animal health and CVI requirements for the state of destination.
- **Clean and Disinfect Equipment (See [USDA C&D guidance](#))**
  - Cleaning
    - Remove all visible organic debris from items to be disinfected (cages, feeding equipment, waterers, etc.). Items made of wood .
    - Wash items thoroughly with soap and water; rinse well and let dry.
  - Disinfection
    - Disinfectants are rendered ineffective on surfaces where organic debris (dirt, feces, spent feed, etc.) is present. It is imperative that surfaces being disinfected are cleaned first as described above. Then employ the following steps to disinfect.
      - Saturate by submersion or spray with 10% household bleach in a well-ventilated area.
      - Allow 10 minutes of contact, then rinse and let dry before allowing animal contact.
- **Control disease vectors**
  - Prevent or limit rabbit exposure to flies, rats, cats, dogs, birds, etc. that can move the virus around on their feet or bodies.
  - Fence out scavengers and wildlife (including wild rabbits).
- **Feeding**
  - Do not put rabbits down on the ground to eat grass, etc.
  - Do not collect outdoor forage and browse to feed rabbits; stay with pelleted feed for now in areas where wild rabbits are infected. Treats can include raw vegetables from grocery stores.
  - Source hay from unaffected areas.
- **Rabbit Health**
  - Monitor your rabbits closely for going off feed, looking limp/depressed, or behaving differently in any way.
  - Call your vet ASAP if you note signs of illness in your rabbits.
  - Consider vaccination for RHDV2 where available. Currently a vaccine is not available in Vermont. It is possible that a vaccine product will be available by December 2020. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture will keep you apprised of this situation. Until that time,

implementing strong biosecurity practices is the best way to prevent disease introduction.

- **Report all unusual mass morbidity (sickness) and/or mortality (death) events to your veterinarian or the Vermont State Veterinarian at (802)828-2421.**
- **Dispose of diseased rabbit carcasses in a safe manner. Double bagging and deep burial is recommended to prevent scavenging. Comply with all town ordinances and state laws when disposing of carcasses. Wash your hands and clean and disinfect all clothing and equipment after handling diseased carcasses.**