



# FAQs: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease

*Updated August 17, 2022*

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has received questions about rabbit hemorrhagic disease and how it might affect exhibiting at community events, like local shows and fairs. Here are answers to the most frequently asked questions.

## **Q What is rabbit hemorrhagic disease?**

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is a fatal disease in rabbits and is considered a foreign animal disease in the United States. This disease is caused by several virus strains. Animal health officials detected one of these strains, Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 (RHDV2), in North America in the past few years. **RHDV2 does not impact human health.**

## **Q What are the symptoms?**

Often, the only signs of RHDV2 are sudden death and blood-stained noses caused by internal bleeding. Infected rabbits experience fever, loss of appetite, difficulty breathing or seizures.

## **Q How is it transmitted?**

RHDV2 can be spread through direct contact with an infected rabbit 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.

## **Q Can my rabbit be infected by a wild rabbit?**

Both domestic and wild rabbits are susceptible to infection with RHDV2. The disease could be spread to domestic rabbits from an infected wild rabbit.

## **Q Is there a vaccine?**

DATCP has approved a RHDV2 vaccine for use in Wisconsin. Rabbit owners interested in vaccinating their rabbits should contact their veterinarians for more information.

## **Q Will I still be able to exhibit my rabbits at community events (e.g., state/county fairs)?**

At this time, DATCP has not required canceling rabbit exhibitions. Nationwide, many show/exhibit organizers have chosen to cancel over concerns about RHDV2, so please check with your local organizer for the most current information.



## **Q What can exhibitors and show organizers do to keep rabbits safe?**

Rabbit owners and show organizers should be informed about this disease and where it has spread in the U.S. Rabbit owners and show organizers should consider this information in deciding whether to hold or attend exhibitions.

Show organizers who elect to hold shows this year should adopt biosecurity practices to limit risks of disease transmission. While there is no way to completely eliminate the risk of transmitting diseases when animals are congregated, the following measures will reduce the risk of transmission of RHD2 to exhibited rabbits:

- Do not allow sick animals to enter the fair or show.
- Rabbit owners should vaccinate their animals for RHDV2 before events; show organizers may consider requiring RHDV2 vaccination for exhibitors.
- Do not allow people other than owners to handle or care for animals on exhibit. Ensure there is enough space between cages to prevent direct contact between rabbits or contact with animals' urine/feces/bedding/food/water.
- Do not share equipment between exhibitors' animals, including water bottles/feed bowls/cleaning equipment/cages, etc.
- Clean and disinfect cages and animal areas between animals. [Use a disinfectant appropriate for the disease.](#)
- Animal owners should isolate animals returning from shows/exhibitions from other animals on their premises for a minimum of 14 days. This includes changing clothing and footwear, using separate equipment, and hand washing after caring for or handling isolated animals. Wash and disinfect clothes and shoes after returning from other rabbits/exhibits and before handling animals on your home premises.
- Judges should minimize or eliminate handling of rabbits. If animals must be handled, judges should wear gloves, wash hands and change outerwear between rabbits.
- Clean and disinfect any common areas where animals are handled.

## **Q Where can I report suspected cases of RHDV2?**

This can be done by contacting the DATCP Division of Animal Health at (608) 224-4872 or by email at [datcpanimalimports@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcpanimalimports@wisconsin.gov). For reports related to wild rabbits, contact the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#).

## **Q Where will I be able to find updates on RHDV2?**

DATCP will provide updates on the disease and its impact on Wisconsin at the [Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease webpage](#). For updates on RHDV2's impact nationwide, visit the [USDA APHIS](#).



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