



Division of Animal Health

July 2, 2021

RHDV2 Update: Rabbit Owners Reminded to Follow Strict Biosecurity Practices

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is reminding shelters and rabbit owners to review their biosecurity measures as Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 (RHDV2) continues to spread across the country.

RHDV2 is a highly contagious viral disease that affects domesticated and wild rabbits. Although fatal to rabbits, the disease does not affect humans. While RHDV2 has **not been detected in Wisconsin**, the disease has been found in 14 states: California, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, Wyoming, New Mexico, Texas, Montana, Florida, South Dakota and, most recently, Georgia. Because the virus continues to spread, DATCP encourages rabbit owners to reduce the risk of introduction by taking extra precautions when moving rabbits to fairs/shows, buying equipment, handling rabbits that aren't their own, introducing new rabbits to their household, and when keeping their animals outdoors. This virus can survive for a long time on surfaces and in the environment, so it is especially important to review your biosecurity measures.

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. A vaccine is currently not licensed in the United States, but vaccines licensed in Europe could be approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for use in affected states.

While the disease has not affected Wisconsin animals, DATCP recommends that shelters and rabbit owners follow these biosecurity practices from the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS):

- Do not allow pet, feral or wild rabbits to have contact with your rabbits or gain entry to the facility or home.
- 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; do not add rabbits to your rabbitry from animal shelters or other rescue operations.
- Separate new rabbits brought into the home or facility from existing rabbits for at least 14 days. Use separate equipment for newly acquired or sick rabbits to avoid spreading disease.
- Sanitize all equipment and cages moved on or off premises before they are returned to the rabbitry. Disinfecting with 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide mixed with water is recommended.

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- If any rabbits die in your rabbitry, work with your veterinarian for diagnostics and disposal. Do not bury or compost these animals if there is a chance they could have this disease.
- Work with your veterinarian to review and improve biosecurity practices in your facility including waste disposal.

Additional Steps to Prevent Disease Spread

- If you own domestic rabbits, do not release them into the wild. If your rabbits appear ill or die suddenly, contact your veterinarian.
- If you volunteer at animal shelters or wildlife rehabilitation facilities, be aware that this disease has been found in feral and wild rabbits in other states. If rabbits appear ill or die suddenly, contact the facility's veterinarian.
- If you find dead or sick wild rabbits, do not touch them and report the discovery.

[Find more information at the DNR website.](#)

Resources

- [USDA APHIS: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Factsheet](#)
- [USDA APHIS: Recommendations for Disinfectants](#)
- [USDA APHIS: Confirmed RHDV2 Detections](#)
- [General Information from the House Rabbit Society](#)
- [General Information from the Rabbit Breeders Association](#)
- [DNR: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus](#)
- [DNR: Protecting Wisconsin Rabbits and Hares: Steps for hunters while training and afield](#)

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