# Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus



### The Disease

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is caused by a very hardy virus called Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV2), which has only recently been diagnosed in North America. It is especially challenging due to its ability to infect both wild and domestic rabbits. The disease can cause sudden death, with potentially high mortality rates, and those surviving can become carriers for several weeks. It is also important to note that it does not pose a threat to human health.

The virus can survive several months at room temperature and can be spread several ways, such as:

- direct contact with an infected rabbit
- contact with urine, faeces, saliva or other body fluids from an infected rabbit
- contact with infected water or food
- carried into the household/farm on owner's hands or contaminated clothing
- carried into the household/farm through meat or fur products from an infected rabbit

## Signs

Signs may be noted 1 to 5 days<sup>1</sup> after coming in contact with the virus and may include:

- fever
- depression
- decreased appetite
- difficulties breathing
- bloody nasal discharge
- difficulty walking, seizures or paralysis
- sudden death (especially if noted in multiple rabbits)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>Rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) fact sheet - Canadian Food Inspection Agency (canada.ca)</u>

#### **Prevention**

The key to prevention is strict biosecurity, due to the lack of accessible vaccine in Canada. The virus is killed by some, but not all, cleaning agents. It is important to discuss with your veterinarian which disinfectants are suitable and their proper usage.

Biosecurity measures should encompass:

- purchasing any new rabbits from healthy rabbitries
- quarantining new rabbits for 15-30 days before introducing them to the household/farm, and being careful to wash hands and wear separate clothing while handling new rabbits
- preventing domestic rabbits from coming in contact with wild rabbits (ensuring that wild rabbits do not have access to any area that domestic rabbits are housed)
- cleaning cages and equipment between rabbits from different sources
- disinfecting shoes upon entering from outdoors or not allowing rabbits access to high traffic areas such as the front door or porch

### For More Information

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) fact sheet - Canadian Food Inspection Agency (canada.ca)

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus - OIE

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease - AVMA