



**Oregon**  
Department  
of Agriculture  
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## **ATTENTION RABBIT OWNERS, EXTENSION PERSONNEL, 4-H / FFA LEADERS**

An outbreak of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD), also known as Viral Hemorrhagic Disease of Rabbits or Rabbit Calicivirus Disease, has been diagnosed in Indiana. Epidemiologic investigation has begun in Kentucky where rabbits were recently purchased and introduced into the rabbit herd in Indiana.

This information is sent to inform you of the outbreak. At this time, rabbits from Indiana and Kentucky will not be allowed to enter the state of Oregon and our office is monitoring the disease progress. We will send updates as needed to interested parties. The following information is provided for dissemination and education.

### **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease: Questions and Answers**

**Q. What is rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD)?**

**A.** RHD is a highly infectious viral disease of the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). All U.S. domestic and commercial rabbits are derived from this species. The American cottontail and jackrabbits are not susceptible to infection.

**Q. Does this disease affect people?**

**A.** No.

**Q. Does RHD affect other animals?**

**A.** It is not known to be harmful to other animals.

**Q. What are the clinical signs of RHD?**

**A.** Rabbits die suddenly within 6 to 24 hours of the onset of fever with few clinical signs. Fever may be as high as 105 degrees F, but often is not detected until rabbits show terminal clinical signs. RHD damages the liver, intestines, and lymphatic tissue and causes terminal blood clots. The death rate ranges from 50 to 100 percent.

**Q. Is there a treatment?**

**A.** No.

**Q. Is there a vaccine?**

- A. No vaccine is legally available for use in the U.S. Vaccination will often reduce the number of rabbits dying from RHD, but will not eradicate the disease. Rabbits vaccinated against the disease may become infected but not show signs of disease, thereby allowing spread of the virus as a carrier.

**Q. How is RHD spread?**

- A. RHD is highly contagious. Large amounts of virus are passed in the droppings of infected rabbits. The virus can then be spread on to the food of healthy rabbits, infecting them. The virus can also be spread by contact with rabbit products, rodents, and contaminated objects, such as cages, feeders, and clothing. Contaminated objects may be a source of spread if not cleaned and disinfected. Infected rabbits that recover may become carriers of the virus. Recovered rabbits can shed virus for at least 4 weeks after recovery.

**Q. How can RHD be prevented?**

- A. To prevent the spread of the disease, breeders should prevent contact between healthy rabbits and infected rabbits and contaminated objects (e.g., cages, feeders, and clothing). Where the health status of a rabbit is unknown it should be kept in mind that healthy appearing rabbits can be in the early stage of disease and later spread the disease. Additionally, recovered rabbits appear healthy but can be carriers and spread the disease to other rabbits. Owners should be cautious and isolate new rabbits and rabbits returning from shows for at least 5 days. If rabbits were exposed to RHD, isolation may prevent spread of the virus to other rabbits. Clinical disease will usually be noticeable within 48 hours of infection. To prevent the spread of the virus, rabbit owners should clean and disinfect all equipment. After a thorough cleaning, rabbit breeders should use one of the following disinfectant solutions on equipment to inactivate the virus: 2-percent 1-Stroke Environ (Steris Corporation, St. Louis MO), 0.5-percent sodium hypochlorite, or 10-percent household bleach.

**Q. How should suspected cases of RHD be reported?**

- A. Veterinarians and rabbit owners who suspect a rabbit may have RHD should immediately contact the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Animal Health and Identification at (503) 986-4680, or the USDA Area Veterinarian in Charge at (503) 399-5871.

**Additional information on the disease is available by visiting the USDA web site at [www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/), or call the telephone numbers listed above.**