

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Virus

May 2021
Animal Health Program

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Virus (RHDV2)

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus was confirmed in southern Alberta in April 2021. It spreads rapidly between rabbits causing severe illness with listlessness, rapid breathing, depression, incoordination or sudden death. RHDV2 can spread to wild rabbit and hare populations. The virus could have a devastating impact on Yukon wildlife if it was introduced into the wild. **This disease poses no risk to human health or to other domestic animals including other pets or livestock.**

RHDV2 in Canada

RHDV2 has been diagnosed in North America in domestic rabbits and is increasingly reported in wild rabbit populations. The virus persists in the environment, even in extreme heat and cold. It was first found in Western Canada in British Columbia in 2018. In April of 2021, it was confirmed to have caused the death of a group of five pet rabbits in southern Alberta.

How can you protect your rabbits?

RHDV2 spreads rapidly in rabbit breeding operations through direct or indirect contact. The virus can remain on equipment and is present on fur and in feces and urine of infected rabbits. People who have been in contact with infected rabbits can spread the virus on their hands, clothing or shoes. The virus can also be present in the meat of slaughtered rabbits and can be spread by contact with meat of infected animals. There is no specific treatment though supportive care may help. Infected rabbits that survive can shed the virus for weeks after recovery.

[Biosecurity](#) is the best tool to protect your rabbits from this virus and other infectious diseases. You should develop and maintain a [biosecurity protocol](#) so that you control everything that comes into your rabbit operation – especially new animals, but also equipment, vehicles, and people. You should have a cleaning and disinfection protocol for any equipment that enters your premises. It is useful to limit the number of people who come into your animal housing facilities.

Before purchasing any rabbits you need to consider the health status of the source that you are buying from. If you currently own animals of high value,



Contact

Animal Health Unit
Government of Yukon
867-667-5600 or
1-800-661-0408, ext. 5600

P.O. Box 2703 (V-7)
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

Program Veterinarian:
867-667-8663

Livestock Health Technician:
867-333-9471

Email: animalhealth@yukon.ca



you may want to postpone new purchases until after it is clear that the current outbreak has stopped. If you are buying rabbits, especially from Alberta or British Columbia, it is important to quarantine new rabbits away from your existing stock for at least two to three weeks. You should always handle your clean herd before working with quarantined animals and follow disinfection procedures after handling those in quarantine.

RHDV2 is an immediately notifiable disease in Canada and the federal government is notified of any confirmed cases. They may implement measures to control the disease. You can contact the Animal Health Unit or your veterinarian for more information on biosecurity, or download our [Yukon farm biosecurity checklist](#) or [biosecurity fact sheet](#) on Yukon.ca, or visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency webpage on [CFIA Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease](#).

Is there a vaccine available?

There is a vaccine to protect against rabbit hemorrhagic virus in Europe but it is not licensed in Canada so can only be made available through special permission by the federal government. It has been used in British Columbia in the past but is not readily available.

What should I do if my rabbits are sick?

If your rabbits show signs of illness, especially if several animals are affected with weakness, depression, groaning, neurological signs, or frothy bloody discharge from the nose or mouth, or if there are sudden deaths in your rabbitry you should speak with a veterinarian as soon as possible. Testing for RHDV2 is available at several laboratories across Canada and your veterinarian can work with you to collect and submit samples if your animals show signs of disease. The Animal Health Unit works closely with Yukon veterinarians to promote and protect the health of Yukon animals, both domestic and wild.

More information

For more information about rabbit hemorrhagic disease see the [BC-SPCA information sheet](#) on their website, [or their fact sheet](#), or contact your veterinarian.

Animal Health Unit

The Animal Health Unit is responsible for health monitoring and diagnosis of disease in both wildlife and domestic animals. The staff provide expertise in laboratory services and in veterinary medicine to support public and animal health.

The Animal Health Unit and Laboratory are located in the Department of Environment at 10 Burns Road, Whitehorse, Yukon.