

RHDV-2 Best Management Practices for NC Rabbit Pen and Pet Owners



Important Notice: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease

Recent positive cases in domestic rabbits in eastern states including Georgia and Tennessee would suggest Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus – Type 2 (RHDV2) will eventually make its way to North Carolina. At this time, we have no evidence that the virus has impacted any wild or domestic rabbits in North Carolina. However, as a rabbit pen or pet owner we wanted to bring this issue to your attention. Vigilance on your part is critical.

RHDV-2 is a highly contagious and often fatal calicivirus affecting rabbits and closely related species; it does not infect other animals or people and is **not related to the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19**.

This virus is very hardy and will remain infectious on the surfaces of objects, on clothing, and in tissues for a significant amount of time. It may be spread between rabbits by inhalation, contact with contaminated equipment, flies and other insects (mechanically), contact with urine or feces from infected rabbits, and contact with feces from predators that have eaten infected rabbits. There is no specific treatment, and the disease is often fatal in native rabbits (potentially 50% to 90%). Rabbits that don't die immediately may have a **poor appetite, inactivity, fever, and a bloody nose**. See links on back page for additional information about RHDV2.

Below are NC Wildlife Resources Commission's guidance for best practices when purchasing and caring for rabbits.

Best Management Practices for Rabbit Pen and Pet Owners:

- Treat incoming rabbits as if they may be carrying the virus.
- Carefully triage all rabbits upon arrival and separate rabbits that appear ill from healthy appearing rabbits.
- Record the source and location of any rabbits purchased or brought in. Be as detailed as possible including GPS coordinates if known or town and state, which should be provided by the vendor. If RHDV-2 is found in NC, this information will be essential for controlling its spread.
- Prior to disposal, report **wild** rabbit mortalities that are not easily explained by other causes to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission by calling the Wildlife Helpline (866-318-2401). Place carcasses into a freezer in doubled freezer bags until Commission staff are able to retrieve them for testing.

RHDV-2 Best Management Practices for NC Rabbit Pen and Pet Owners



- For **domestic** rabbit cases of mortality that are not easily explained by other causes, please report to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) at 919-707-3250. Place carcasses into a freezer in doubled freezer bags until NC-DA&CS is able to provide further guidance.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces and equipment (1 part household bleach to 10 parts water) after they have come in contact with rabbits; use 10% bleach soak-able shirts and pants, shoe covers, and gloves for handling rabbits and use clean clothes/equipment for each animal. Clothing used will need to be soaked in 10% bleach solution for at least 10 minutes. Towels or any other fabric will also need to be soaked in 10% bleach solutions for at least 10 minutes prior to washing.
- Protect feed from flies, birds, and rodents.
- Control biting flies and other insects.
- If disposal of a carcass is needed, either incinerate or bury it at least 3 feet deep to prevent scavenging.
- For rabbits purchased from out of state or from pet trade vendors driving routes across the country to deliver purchased rabbits, please see the following rabbit importation rules from NC Dept of Agriculture: [Rabbit Importation Rules](#)
- **Infected rabbits may shed the virus for more than 30 days.**
 - ◇ Rabbit Pens: Hold current penned rabbits in a separate location from incoming rabbits for at least 30 days post receipt before introducing new rabbits into the pen(s). Keep domestic and wild rabbits separate.
 - ◇ Pet Owners: Hold current domestic rabbit pets in a different location from incoming domestic rabbits for 30 days after receipt.
- Do not import hay from western states for bedding; imported hay has been implicated in spreading the virus to new areas.

[NCWRC RHDV2 flyer](#)

[RHDV2 Distribution Map](#) - U.S. Department of Agriculture