

Guidance for Rabbit Hunters & Field Trial Participants

What is Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease?

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2 (RHDV2) is a very contagious and deadly virus that affects all rabbit and hare species. It does not infect humans or dogs. RHDV2 is easily spread by direct contact with infected rabbits (live or dead) or during interactions with scavengers, insects, and dogs that have had recent contact with infected rabbits. The virus can remain active for months in the environment and rabbits can get the virus directly from the environment. The virus also remains active for extended periods on clothing, shoes, and equipment but it is inactivated by a 10% bleach solution. The virus spreads easily and rapidly through rabbit populations and over 80% of infected rabbits may die from RHDV2, potentially causing severe local or widespread rabbit population declines.

How to Minimize Spread of RHDV2

- Do not release domestic rabbits into the wild
- Do not move wild rabbits for any reason, including stocking or dog training purposes, as translocation of rabbits can spread disease
- Try to eliminate all contact between dogs and dead rabbits
- Apply a dry pet shampoo (and follow the directions on the product label) to dogs after the last hunt of the day or in between hunts if the dogs are traveling the same day to a new hunting area located greater than 5 miles away
- After cleaning rabbits, do not leave remains where they can be spread by scavengers
- Bury rabbit remains deep enough to discourage scavenging or double-bag and discard in a trash bin, trash dump, or at a landfill
- Wear rubber gloves when cleaning rabbits and wash hands thoroughly when finished

- Clean all knives, tools, and surfaces used to process a rabbit with detergent and then submerge in a 10% bleach solution for at least 10 minutes
- After handling dead rabbits, wash or change clothes and disinfect the soles of your shoes with a 10% bleach solution before traveling to new hunting areas or handling domestic rabbits
- The virus can persist in frozen meat and could be a source of infection for wild and domestic rabbits. Cook rabbits thoroughly to at least 165°F before consuming or feeding to dogs.
- If you have pet domestic rabbits, do not handle them until you have showered and changed clothes after cleaning or handling dead wild rabbits

How to Disinfect Knives, Tools, and Surfaces

1. Use a 10% bleach (sodium hypochlorite) solution
2. Mix 1/2 cup 6% or 8.25% household bleach in 1 gallon of water
3. Ensure contact time is at least 10 minutes
4. Wear gloves and eye protection when mixing the solution and work in a well-ventilated area

Signs of RHDV2 Infection

- Multiple dead rabbits (greater than three) found in close proximity over a short period of time
- Infected rabbits often die suddenly with no outward signs of illness, sometimes out in the open and not under cover
- Dead rabbits may exhibit frothy, bright red blood around the nose and mouth

Current State of RHDV2 in North America

- RHDV2 was first found in wild rabbits in April 2020
- As of April 2021, Georgia has NO reported cases.
- As of April 2021, most cases in wild rabbits have been in the southwestern United States and Mexico. RHDV2 was reported from domestic rabbits on a single property in Florida in December 2020. No additional cases have been reported in Florida.
- RHDV2 spread across the continent of Australia in 18 months, therefore rapid spread across the U.S. is possible
- Localized and large-scale population-level impacts are possible as a result of an RHDV2 outbreak

What to Do If You Suspect RHDV2

- Report possible RHDV2 to the nearest Georgia Wildlife Resources Division Game Management regional office:
<https://georgiawildlife.com/about/contact#gm>
- If you find a dead rabbit that you suspect may have had RHD, double bag the carcass and keep refrigerated. Clean the outside of the bag and anything that touched the carcass with 10% bleach. Contact your nearest Game Management office for testing.
- Do not handle or clean rabbits found dead or that appear sick

Additional Information about RHDV

- Center for Food Security & Public Health (general facts):
http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit_hemorrhagic_disease.pdf
- USDA (general facts):
https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf
- USDA (cleaning and disinfection procedures):
https://www.tahc.texas.gov/animal_health/rabbits/USDA_CandDofRHDV2.pdf