



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Diagnosed on Single Premise

January 4, 2021

On December 30, 2020, The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) was notified of a single premise that had rabbit mortality and tested positive for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Type 2 (RHDV-2). The premise was cleaned and disinfected, and the investigation is ongoing. The source of the virus has not yet been determined and there are no other confirmed or suspect cases in Florida at this time.

RHDV is an extremely contagious and often fatal viral disease of domesticated and wild rabbits. There are three forms of the RHDV virus. RHDV-2 is believed to infect all ages of domestic rabbits but less deadly than types RHDV and RHDVa. As of today, RHDV-2 has been confirmed in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Texas and Wyoming in 2020. RHDV2 was identified in Washington in 2019. RHDV-2 is both stable and infectious in the environment for long periods of time, potentially surviving more than 3 months without a host.

RHDV2 remains classified as a foreign animal disease. Therefore, suspect RHDV-2 should be reported to the Division of Animal Industry at RAD@FDACS.gov or calling (850) 410-0900. Testing rabbits is key to monitoring the disease spread. RHDV-2 has been observed as high mortality events in multiple species of wild (free-ranging) rabbits in the affected states as well. Wild rabbits introduced into domestic populations have also served as a disease source to the domestic rabbits. Sick wild rabbits should not be introduced to a premises with domestic rabbits. Sick or dead wild rabbits should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Wildlife Health Hotline: (866) 293-9282.

The first sign of infection with RHDV is often sudden and unexpected death in previously healthy rabbits. Those that do not die immediately may demonstrate poor appetite, depression, inactivity, and listlessness; they will have a fever and bloody nasal discharge may be noted. Later signs relate to organ failure and include jaundice, respiratory distress, diarrhea, weight loss, bloating, and death. Rabbits surviving infection are believed to shed the virus for at least 30 days, but in experimental cases, they shed the virus for up to 105 days. Long term/permanent shedding is unlikely. Exposed and surviving rabbits have immunity to that viral strain for an unknown amount of time.

- All rabbits imported into Florida from a non-RHDV affected state are required to have an Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (OCVI) dated within 30 days of entry (see

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease and New Emergency Rule for Importation of Rabbits

Animal Movement Page, <https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Livestock/Animal-Movement>)

- ALL SUSCEPTIBLE ANIMALS IMPORTED FROM A RHDV AFFECTED STATE MUST HAVE AN OCVI DATED WITHIN 72 HOURS OF ENTRY AND A VETERINARY STATEMENT
 - New Emergency Rule effective October 22, 2020, https://www.flrules.org/gateway/View_Notice.asp?id=23794699

5CER20-5 Temporary Restrictions on the Importation of Lagomorphs.

(1) Definitions.

(a) Lagomorph. Any member of the taxonomic order Lagomorpha.

(b) Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD). A highly fatal hemorrhagic disease of rabbits and other lagomorphs caused by viruses in the family Caliciviridae, primarily Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus and Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2.

(2) All Lagomorphs originating from a state that has had RHD diagnosed in wild or domestic animals in the past 30 months, are required to be accompanied by an Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection which must include the statement in (3) and be dated within seventy-two (72) hours prior to entry into Florida.

(3) The OCVI must include the following statement from the examining veterinarian, “All animals on this shipment have not been exposed to a known or suspected case of RHD and show no clinical signs of diseases on the inspection date of (inspection/examination date).”

Rulemaking Authority 570.07(21), (23), 585.08(2)(a) FS. Law Implemented 585.08(1), 585.145 FS. History—New 10-22-20.

Biosecurity is the key to prevention of RHDV:

- Keep a closed rabbitry.
- Exclude wild and feral rabbits from the rabbitry.
- Wash your hands between handling rabbits in different pens.
- Control flies and biting insects.
- Clean and disinfect equipment, tools, footwear, feed and water containers, cages. Recommended disinfectants include those in the phenol class or 10 percent bleach. Clean thoroughly with soap and water first and apply disinfectant for recommended contact time. Rinse well and allow to dry before allowing animal contact.
- House rabbits indoors if possible.
- Do not share equipment with others who raise rabbits.
- Contact your veterinarian if sick or dead rabbits are observed and submit carcasses for examination and prompt sampling.
- Do not transport rabbits into or out of RHDV quarantine areas.
- Separate new rabbits or those returning from shows for one month.

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Unfortunately, there are currently no USDA licensed vaccines for this disease, although RHDV2 vaccines are available overseas. The Division of Animal Industry is working with the USDA on the potential importation and use of these vaccines in Florida.

Additional disease resources:

Iowa State -

http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit_hemorrhagic_disease.pdf

National Wildlife Health Center - <https://www.usgs.gov/media/files/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-virus-2-confirmed-wild-rabbits-us>

USDA – <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/sa-epidemiology-animalhealth-ceah/ri>

- https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf.
- <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd>

EPA (Information on disinfectant products)

- <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides/epa-and-usda-release-information-mitigating-rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-virus-rhdv2>

Status/Situational Reports from RHDV2 Affected States:

Arizona - <https://agriculture.az.gov/animals/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-fact-sheet>

California - https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Animal_Health/Pets_Other_Un-Reg_Species.html#rhd

Colorado - <https://ag.colorado.gov/animals/livestock-health/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-virus-rhdv2>

New Mexico - <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-cause-for-rabbit-mortality/>

Texas Animal Health Commission - https://www.tahc.texas.gov/animal_health/rabbits/

Washington State- <https://agr.wa.gov/departments/animals-livestock-and-pets/animal-health/animal-diseases/rabbit-disease>