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### **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2**

Rabbits may not be on the list of high-valued, livestock industries in the state of Kansas, but for many people (*my oldest daughter included*) rabbits are an important part of life; for reasons ranging from loveable pets to an efficient protein food source. Whatever the reason might be for keeping rabbits, it is important to note that a serious disease virus has recently been detected in Kansas and poses a significant threat to rabbit health.

In July 2022, the National Veterinary Service Laboratories confirmed detection of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease virus Type 2 (RHDV2) in a domestic rabbit from Leavenworth County. RHDV2 is a highly contagious and fatal disease that only affects rabbits; it does NOT impact human health. This is the first case of RHDV2 in Kansas, although many states to the west of Kansas, most notably Colorado, have reported cases of RHDV2 in domestic rabbits, wild cottontails and jackrabbits in recent years. RHDV2 is a highly contagious and fatal disease of rabbits. This disease is considered a foreign animal disease (FAD) and is of high concern at the state and federal levels.

Since RHDV2 is highly contagious and affects both domestic and wild rabbits. Many times, the only signs of the disease are sudden death and blood-stained noses caused by internal bleeding. Infected rabbits may also develop a fever, go off of feed, or show respiratory or nervous signs. With the primary detection symptom being sudden death, prevention of the spread of this disease is extremely problematic.

The RHDV2 virus is very resistant to extreme temperatures. It can be spread through direct contact or exposure to an infected rabbit's excretions or blood. The virus can also survive and spread from carcasses, food, water, and any contaminated materials. People can spread the virus indirectly by carrying it on their clothing and shoes.

An emergency use vaccine for RHDV2 has recently become available in the U.S., but is not yet widely utilized. The best steps for an owner to protect your rabbits is to practice good biosecurity. These actions will significantly reduce the chance of RHDV2 or other contagious diseases affecting your rabbits. It is best to follow these recommended biosecurity practices:

- Do not allow pet or wild rabbits to have contact with your rabbits or gain entry to the facility.
- Do not allow visitors in rabbitries or let them handle pet rabbits without protective clothing (including coveralls, shoe covers, hair covering, and gloves).
- Always wash hands with warm soapy water before entering your rabbit area, after removing protective clothing and before leaving the rabbit area.
- Do not introduce new rabbits from unknown or untrusted sources. Do not add rabbits to your rabbitry from animal shelters or other types of rescue operations.
- If you bring outside rabbits into your facility or home, keep them separated from your existing rabbits for at least 30 days. Use separate equipment for newly acquired or sick rabbits to avoid spreading disease.
- Sanitize all equipment and cages moved on or off premises before they are returned to the rabbitry, disinfecting with 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide mixed with water.
- Establish a working relationship with a veterinarian to review biosecurity practices for identification and closure of possible gaps.

Rabbit breeders and owners need to be on heightened alert to be vigilant in addressing prevention of the spread of this disease. Everyone should remain observant for hemorrhagic, wild rabbits as well. Information for this article came from the Kansas Department of Agriculture and can be found at: [https://agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/division-of-animal-health/animal-diseases/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-virus-serotype-2-\(rhdv2\)](https://agriculture.ks.gov/divisions-programs/division-of-animal-health/animal-diseases/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-virus-serotype-2-(rhdv2))