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## INDIANA STATE BOARD OF ANIMAL HEALTH

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### ANIMAL HEALTH ADVISORY Keep Rabbits Healthy This Show Season (13 April 2021)

As the season for fairs and exhibitions begins, the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) encourages rabbit owners to be aware of signs of diseases and take steps to protect their animals.

Currently, rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus 2 (RHDV2) is a disease of concern in the United States. In recent weeks, we have seen an upsurge in cases in the Southwestern states, along with new detections in several previously unaffected states including: Oregon, Montana, Idaho and Arkansas. This disease has been detected in both wild and domestic rabbits.

Rabbit owners can ***learn more about this disease and subscribe for email/text updates*** from BOAH regarding rabbit disease information on the BOAH website. If RHDV or other significant health issue is detected in Indiana, BOAH will send the latest information to subscribers. Subscribe online:

[www.in.gov/boah/species-information/rabbits/](http://www.in.gov/boah/species-information/rabbits/)

#### **Rabbit Disease and Biosecurity Videos**

BOAH veterinarian, Dr. Melissa Justice, has recorded two different educational presentations on rabbit biosecurity and diseases. Both presentations are available online. Some 4-H clubs have used these videos during meetings.

- **Rabbit Biosecurity:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm1-zq69H4g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm1-zq69H4g)
- **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV2):** [www.in.gov/boah/species-information/rabbits/](http://www.in.gov/boah/species-information/rabbits/)

#### **Traveling with Rabbits**

As the number of cases of RHDV2 grows, anyone traveling with rabbits, especially for exhibitions, should contact the state-of-destination about pre-entry requirements before leaving home. Many states are requiring a certificate of veterinary inspection (CVI) to accompany the animals.

#### **About Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV)**

RHDV is a highly contagious viral disease in rabbits with a high mortality rate. This virus is considered a foreign animal disease in the United States.

In the past few years, RHDV Serotype 2 (RHDV2) has been detected sporadically in North America in wild and domestic rabbits. In recent months, spread continues with the virus being identified in several more states. BOAH advises rabbit owners to be aware of signs of the disease and take steps to protect their animals—especially as the season for fairs and exhibitions begins.

(page 1 of 3)

The two strains of this disease, RHDV and RHDV Serotype 2, are similar except RHDV2 affects both wild and domestic rabbits. **RHDV and RHDV2 do not impact human health** and is not known to affect other animals. RHDV has no known cure and a vaccine is not readily available in the United States.

### **Clinical Signs of RHDV**

The most common sign of RHDV is sudden death with blood-stained noses caused by internal bleeding. Infected rabbits may develop a fever, be hesitant to eat, or show respiratory or nervous system signs.

Some rabbits may be asymptomatic carriers capable of shedding the virus for up to 2 months post-infection. Rabbits who survive the virus may show signs of dullness and anorexia. They are carriers of the infection and can shed the virus for at least 42 days.

### **RHDV Transmission**

RHDV can spread through direct contact or exposure to an infected rabbit's saliva, secretions from the eyes and nose, urine, feces, or blood. The virus can also be spread by contaminated materials such as carcasses, food, water, etc. People can spread the virus indirectly by carrying it on their clothing and shoes.

RHDV is very resistant to extreme temperatures. The virus can live in an environment for up to 15 weeks in dry conditions and can survive freezing. The virus is hardy in rabbit meat and can survive in frozen or decomposing meat for months.

### **Report Suspect Cases of RHDV**

While RHDV2 has not been diagnosed in Indiana, Hoosier rabbit owners should be prepared to know what to do if signs consistent with RHDV2 are identified.

- Domestic or pet rabbits: Contact a veterinarian or BOAH for guidance.
- Wild rabbits with signs consistent with RHDVs (such as bleeding from nose, mouth or rectum), report to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources at:  
<https://reportsickanimal.dnr.in.gov/report>

### **Testing**

Currently, no easy, reliable antemortem test exists. Contact BOAH if clinical signs are observed in domestic rabbits. A veterinarian will collect samples from potentially infected animals to send to designated laboratories.

### **Protect Your Rabbits**

Rabbit owners are encouraged to follow good biosecurity practices to keep rabbits healthy at home as well as at exhibitions.

- Monitor rabbits daily for signs of illness.
- Before caring for rabbits, wash hands and change into farm-dedicated clothing and boots.
- Minimize visitors to rabbit housing areas.
  - Provide disposable foot covers and gloves to visitors handling rabbits.
- Prevent contact with wild rabbits and areas where wild rabbits roam.
- Do not purchase rabbits from unfamiliar or untrusted sources.
- Do not collect and use wild plants as a food source.
- Store feed and bedding in tightly sealed containers to prevent contamination.
- Do not share equipment with other rabbit owners.

- Clean and disinfect equipment, waterers, feeders and other items that come in contact with rabbits regularly. Rinse waterers and feeders before filling.
- Remove manure regularly.
- Control rodents and insects.
- Isolate new rabbits and rabbits returning from a show for at least 30 days and monitor for signs of illness. To protect against rabbit hemorrhagic disease, isolate for 60 days.
  - Care for isolated rabbits only after caring for other rabbits. Practice proper hygiene after caring for rabbits.
- If possible, avoid traveling to areas experiencing a disease outbreak.

### **More Information**

More information on RHDV and rabbit biosecurity is online: [www.in.gov/boah/species-information/rabbits/](http://www.in.gov/boah/species-information/rabbits/)

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