

RHDV2 Information for MCRS Adopters

Update: **Oct 6, 2021**

Thank you sincerely for adopting from the Minnesota Companion Rabbit Society! We would like to share news about the recent confirmation of the RHDV2 virus in Minnesota. This document is intended to guide you in keeping your rabbit(s) safe, as well as removing some of the stress you may be feeling knowing RHDV2 is in our community.

RHDV2 (Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease V2) is a "highly contagious disease caused by a strain of the RHD virus that is infecting and killing domestic rabbits and wild rabbits." (USDA). Rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD), whether from classical RHDV strains or RHDV-2, often kills rabbits without outward signs of disease. "Many times, the only signs of the disease are sudden death and blood-stained noses caused by internal bleeding," APHIS information states.

Here's a link to the press releases about confirmation of the disease and a vaccine approved for emergency use from the MN Board of Animal Health's website:

https://www.bah.state.mn.us/news_release/highly-contagious-disease-confirmed-in-pet-rabbit/

https://www.bah.state.mn.us/news_release/vaccine-authorized-for-recently-confirmed-rabbit-disease/

RHDV is highly contagious. It can be spread by:

Direct contact: A rabbit comes into contact with an infected rabbit or the urine or feces of an infected rabbit.

Indirect contact:

- **Human contact:** People can spread the virus to their rabbits if they have been in contact with infected rabbits or in contact with objects contaminated by the virus, including feces from an infected rabbit.
- **Inanimate objects:** Contact of a rabbit with objects contaminated by the virus (i.e. fomites), including clothing, shoes, and car and truck tires.
- **Rabbit products:** Contact with fur, meat or wool from infected rabbits.
- **Mechanical Vectors and Predators:** Insects (including flies, fleas, and mosquitoes), birds, rodents, predators, and other pets (cats and dogs) are known to spread the virus by acting as indirect hosts or mechanical vectors, transporting the virus from an infected rabbit to a healthy rabbit. In Australia, flies who have been in contact with sick or dead rabbits are believed to be a primary source of long-distance viral transmission. RHDV can be excreted in the feces of predators who have consumed sick rabbits.
- **Food/Water:** Ingesting virus-contaminated water or food.

*Due to the seriousness of this disease and how easily it can spread, the Minnesota Companion Rabbit Society has made **the difficult decision to pause all events where rabbits are allowed to gather. This includes: Hoppy Hours, Nail Trims & Scent Gland Cleanings, Adoption Events, bunny dates.** Sadly, we need to pause any intake of new rabbits from the general public or shelters/rescues that cannot adequately quarantine rabbits prior to transfer. **We will still be offering Supply Sales at our South St. Paul location. Please see our Facebook page and website for more information.***

So, in light of all this frightening information, what can we do?

First, MCRS is working on a plan to get all foster rabbits vaccinated as soon as possible. There is a mass vaccination event being held on Oct. 30/31 at the State Fairgrounds which anyone can register for. Our President, Karen Skewes, is in conversations with our rescue partners and local veterinarians about holding a vaccination clinic in the coming weeks. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we finalize any logistics. If you would like to bring your own rabbits to the mass vaccination event on Oct. 30/31, please go ahead and register at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/rhdv2-rabbit-disease-mass-vaccination-pre-register-tickets-183904211447>

We have also confirmed that **Valley View Vet Clinic in Burnsville** will be hosting a vaccine clinic this month. Please see their Facebook page for details.

We're updating our list of rabbit vets (<https://www.mncompanionrabbit.org/rabbit-vets-in-minnesota>) to include information on when they will be offering the RHDV2 vaccine in their clinics. Please feel free to contact your current vet for this information as well. Please understand that many are opting to wait to stock vaccine until it is available in 1-dose vials. Currently, it is only available in 25-dose vials, and it must be used with the day it is opened. This makes it cost-prohibitive for most private vets. *Please be patient and understanding as they work on stocking the vaccine. Our rabbit vets are remarkable and doing all they can to help keep our rabbits safe!*

Second, we are seeking to recruit additional foster volunteers to help during this difficult time when adoption events and bunny dates are cancelled. We don't want to overburden our wonderful foster homes and understand that this period may be very stressful. If you know of anyone who might be able to foster a rabbit for 2 weeks minimum, please have them email us at

info@mncompanionrabbit.org or contact Brenda Malark directly at brendamalark@comcast.net

Ideally, we are seeking homes without a rabbit in them currently, or with a separate floor to house a foster rabbit.

Third, we would like to share biosecurity and preventative measures with you from the experts at the national House Rabbit Society and the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials.

Human Best Practices

- Have indoor and outdoor footwear; do not wear outdoor shoes indoors and vice versa.

- Wash hands before and after handling or caring for rabbits. Also after handling other pets, such as cats, dogs and guinea pigs.
- Do not allow visitors who also have rabbits to interact with your rabbits. Be sure to have them take off their shoes and wash their hands in your home.
- Do not handle rabbits belonging to other homes, if possible.

Clean and Disinfect Equipment (this information is mostly for foster rabbits, but you may want to follow the same procedures to keep your pet bunnies safe)

The following procedures should be followed after a foster rabbit has left your home, either to be adopted or moving to another foster home. They also need to be followed vigilantly if exposure to RHDV2 is suspected (i.e., your foster or owned rabbit becomes ill) or when quarantining new intakes.

- Cleaning
 - Remove all visible organic debris from items to be disinfected (pens, litter boxes, crocks, etc.). Only hard plastic-type toys can be sanitized. Wood, fabric, and paper toys cannot be sanitized; it is best to send these items with the foster rabbit to their new home or discard them.
 - If your foster rabbit has a carpet sample, it should be discarded or sent to the new home with the rabbit.
 - Wash items thoroughly with soap and water; rinse well and let dry.
- Disinfection
 - Saturate by submersion or spray with 10% household bleach (sodium hypochlorite) OR 1% Virkon-S (by DuPont) OR accelerated hydrogen peroxide products (Rescue™, Accel, Virox 5). **Note: MCRS will be offering free spray bottles of Rescue™ to any foster homes that would like to use it for disinfection. Rescue is far less toxic around pets than bleach and does not need to be rinsed thoroughly; it can just be left to dry.**
 - Allow 10 minutes of contact if using bleach or Virkon, then rinse and let dry before allowing animal contact.
 - Allow 5 minutes of contact if using accelerated hydrogen peroxide (Rescue). No rinsing is needed, but you may rinse lightly with water if desired.

Control disease vectors

- Flies, rats, cats, dogs, birds, etc. can move the virus around on their feet or body. If a foster home has animals of other species in the home, or regularly interacts with such, they should take extra precaution with handwashing and clothes changing. Rabbits should be housed in a room separate from all resident animals with no contact.
- Do not leave windows or doors open to prevent insects coming into the house.
- Always change clothes after gardening, working outside, or going for a walk/hike in natural areas. Keep camping equipment stored far away from rabbits and their environment.
- Keep cats and dogs updated on their monthly flea and tick preventative.

Feeding

- Do not put rabbits down on the ground to eat grass, etc.
- Do not collect outdoor forage or greens from a backyard garden to feed rabbits; stay with pelleted feed for now in areas where wild rabbits are infected. Treats can include raw vegetables from grocery stores.
- Know the source of hay and whether it was grown outside an outbreak area, or harvested/stored securely over 8 months, exceeding the known time the virus may be infectious. ***(MCRS sells hay from Oxbow, which stores their hay to exceed 8 months, so it is safe to feed all rabbits.)***
- At this time, we do not know the risk that feeding greens/produce may present to rabbits. There may be a risk of RHDV contamination of produce during growing/harvesting in outbreak areas. The disease is currently spreading in areas where produce is commercially grown. When choosing whether to feed produce to rabbits, consider the following:
 - Significantly reduces risk:
 - Know where produce was grown, and look for produce not grown in a current outbreak area.
 - Grow greens in covered spaces (greenhouses/indoors/hydroponically). You may also purchase hydroponically grown greens at the grocery store.
 - Thoroughly wash produce for at least 2 minutes, with several water changes during the process.
 - Peel vegetables.

Rabbit Health

- Monitor your rabbits closely for:
 - decrease in appetite
 - Lethargy, looking limp/depressed
 - yellowing of eyes or skin
 - any signs of blood coming from nose, mouth, or rectum
 - behaving differently in any way
 - Trouble breathing
 - ***Please note: signs listed above do not necessarily mean your rabbit has RHDV2. They are just potential symptoms. It is very important to have a vet see a rabbit with any of these symptoms to rule RHDV2 out.***
- Call your vet ASAP if you note signs of illness in your rabbits.

Best Practices to Keep Your Rabbit(s) Safe

House your rabbits indoors. We strongly recommend that rabbits be kept indoors, or in enclosed environments, and not allowed outdoor playtime. Rabbits who live outdoors and those who exercise outdoors are at greater risk of contracting this disease.

Wash your hands thoroughly before handling your rabbits, particularly when you come home from places where other rabbits may have been, or where people who have been in contact with rabbits may have been, including feed stores, pet stores, fairgrounds, humane societies, etc.

Adopt a “no shoes in the house” policy, or keep your bunnies from running in high traffic areas of your home.

Trim your rabbit’s nails and groom them at home. Learn how to trim your rabbit’s nails and groom them at home, instead of taking them to a rescue or vet’s office, which are higher-risk locations.

Change your clothes and wash your hands after handling or coming in contact with other rabbits. Wash these clothes twice in hot water and dry in the dryer before wearing around your rabbit.

Don’t let your rabbit come into physical contact with other rabbits from outside your home, for example, “hoppy hour” or “bunny playground” activities.

If you volunteer at a shelter in an area with an outbreak, have special clothes and shoes that you wear only at the shelter. You may want to wear shoe covers or plastic bags over your shoes, secured with a rubber band. When you leave the shelter, remove the bags and dispose of them before you get into your car, making sure not to touch the outside of the bag. Follow clothes laundering instructions above, and shoe disinfecting instructions below. This protects the shelter rabbits as well as your own. The same considerations apply to anyone who sees rabbits at work and also has rabbits at home.

To disinfect shoes that may have been contaminated, place the shoes in a bath containing one of the approved disinfectants. The shoes must be in contact with the disinfectant for the required contact time, during which time the disinfectant must remain wet. Be sure to read the label instructions for contact time for your disinfectant. Here is a link to approved disinfection instructions:

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv-cleaning-guidance.pdf

For further information, please see these websites:

<https://rescuedisinfectants.com/product-info/>

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=547813859640028

<https://rabbit.org/rhdv/>

Please do not hesitate to contact one of us if you have any questions:

1. Brenda Malark, brendamalark@comcast.net
2. Emily Hildebrandt, ehilde72@gmail.com
3. Karen Skewes, president@mncompanionrabbit.org

DISCLAIMER

All information shared by Minnesota Companion Rabbit Society is researched, up to date, and accurate to the best of our ability. We are not a licensed veterinary organization and do not intend to present ourselves as such. Always seek information from veterinary and animal health professionals whenever possible. Do not rely solely on social media for information. There is much misinformation out there and you need to go to the experts for this important information. If you have any questions or find inaccurate information please contact us.