



Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Vaccine

Authorized veterinarians can obtain a vaccine for rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD), but should do so only on a limited basis in or near areas quarantined for the disease.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) classifies [rabbit hemorrhagic disease](#) (RHD) as a foreign animal disease (FAD). That puts it in the same category as foot-and-mouth disease, African swine fever, African horse sickness, and many other serious animal diseases.

WSDA works hard with other states and our federal partners to identify and prevent RHD and other FADs from spreading to animals in the United States. It is therefore critical that we take steps to prevent the overuse of RHD vaccines at this time. Although vaccines are available in countries where these diseases are present, APHIS controls access to them to prevent interference with rapid FAD diagnosis.

Vaccinations can potentially interfere with FAD diagnosis because tests for these diseases are based on antibodies created when the animal has been exposed to a virus. The presence of antibodies in a blood test is the primary indicator used to identify the disease. Animals infected with RHD are difficult to distinguish from vaccinated animals because, in both cases, they would test positive for the antibodies.

When a FAD is identified in the U.S., APHIS may authorize importation of the corresponding vaccine on a controlled basis to make sure they can track the geographic area where the vaccine is in use and remain confident the vaccine is being used safely and effectively by licensed veterinarians.

Rabbit owners [in or near an area where RHD has been identified](#), who are interested in getting their animals vaccinated can contact their veterinarian to indicate interest. Veterinarians interested in applying for permission to import the vaccine can contact Dr. Susan Kerr at WSDA at 360-789-7664 or skerr@agr.wa.gov.



In the meantime, rabbit owners should enact the following biosecurity measures:

1. Keep your rabbits inside if possible.
2. Have indoor and outdoor footwear; do not wear your outdoor shoes indoors and vice versa.
3. Wash your hands before and after handling or caring for your rabbits.
4. Clean and disinfect feeders and other equipment daily if possible. Clean with soap and water, rinse well, spray with or submerge in 10-percent bleach for 10 minutes, rinse well and let dry before re-use.
5. Control flies, rats, cats, dogs, etc. that can move the virus around on their feet.
6. Don't allow visitors who also have rabbits.
7. Prevent contact with wild rabbits.
8. Do not put rabbits down on the ground to eat grass, etc. Also do not collect forage to feed them; stay with pelleted feed for now.
9. Don't handle others' rabbits.
10. Monitor your rabbits closely for going off feed, looking limp/depressed, or behaving differently in any way. This viral form (RHD2) is less fatal than the two other versions, so treatment may be successful if started right away. Call your vet ASAP.
11. Sign up for updates from the [WSDA email list](#).