

Peter Rabbit running around your house?

An emerging, highly contagious viral disease called Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV2) has been identified in Wyoming.

The virus is fatal and affects domestic, feral, and wild rabbits,

including hares, jackrabbits, and cottontails. This disease is specific only to rabbits. RHDV2 does not affect people or other pets such as dogs, cats, and horses. If left unchecked, RHDV2 could have

huge impacts on the pet and meat rabbit industry.

What does it look like?

Typically, the first signs of disease will be sudden death or illness in multiple rabbits. Some animals may have a blood-stained nose and mouth due to internal bleeding. Signs of this disease prior to death are generally subtle and may include fever, respiratory distress, loss of appetite or nervous system abnormalities (incoordination, seizure-like activity, etc.). Sadly, 70 to 90 percent of infected rabbits die from this disease.

How is it spread?

The virus is spread through direct contact with infected rabbits and rabbit carcasses, as well as environments with infected carcasses, blood, urine, and feces. This disease can spread indirectly by people carrying the virus on items such as clothing or shoes. Insect scavengers, predators, and birds that come in contact with an infected rabbit can also spread the disease. The virus is resistant to extreme temperatures and can survive in the environment for extended periods, up to 15 weeks in dry conditions.

Keeping your rabbitry safe

Rabbit owners are advised to enhance their typical biosecurity



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His health may be in danger!

measures by not allowing visitors to rabbitries, keeping wild rabbits from co-mingling with domestic/pet rabbits (cages and fencing), and limiting new animal introduction and including a proper quarantine period for new individuals.

Additionally, good biosecurity measures for rabbit owners should include hand washing before and after working with rabbits, a change of clothing/footwear, sanitation/disinfection of personal equipment, and not sharing equipment with other rabbit owners. Please contact your local veterinarian for help. If you have any questions about your rabbits or this disease.

Although RHDV2 cannot be transferred to humans or animals outside the rabbit species, it is important to note rabbits can transmit other diseases such as plague or tularemia. Do not handle or consume sick or dead wildlife, and do not allow domestic pets to contact or consume wildlife carcasses. Please contact your veterinarian if your cat or dog comes in contact with a sick or dead rabbit (or any other wildlife).

A vaccine is available for RHDV2, manufactured by Medgene Labs. The vaccine was scheduled for release in October. Two doses are required for immunization. Further information may be found at medgenelabs.com/rhdv2, or by contacting your local veterinarian.

What about rabbit stew?

This virus doesn't need to keep you from making your favorite meals if you hunt rabbits or raise them for food, you just need to be aware of a few additional things. Do not harvest rabbits that appear sick or dead. Although RHDV2 poses no risk for humans, there are other potentially dangerous diseases that could affect you. Removing these sick or dead animals can also spread the disease to other areas. To prevent disease spreading, it is important to wear gloves when field-dressing and cleaning rabbits. All parts of the rabbit not being used for food, like entrails and hides, should be double bagged and thrown in the trash away from other rabbits and scavengers, according to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Talk about working for a meal!

Similar to all wildlife meat preparation, meat should be cooked thoroughly, and all surfaces in contact with meat should be cleaned and disinfected with an appropriate sanitizing agent. Individuals handling meat should use effective and thorough hand washing practices with soap and at least 20 seconds of scrub/contact time. All game should be thoroughly cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees. It is also important to know that freezing does not kill the virus.

Want to know more?

Visit these websites for the latest updates and information about RHDV2:

- wlsb.state.wy.us
- <https://bit.ly/wyo-wildlife-disease>

Fresh, frozen, or undercooked rabbit meat may be a source of infection for domestic and wild rabbits. So, when you're cleaning out the fridge or freezer of rabbit meat, make sure to dispose of the meat in the same way.

How you can help!

RHDV2 is a reportable disease in Wyoming and the United States, and anyone suspecting the disease in domestic rabbits should contact their local veterinarian.

Any suspect wild rabbit deaths should be reported to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's State Wildlife veterinarian at the Wildlife Health Laboratory (307-745-5865).

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