



RABBIT HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE: HELP PREVENT THIS THREAT TO NEW YORK'S RABBITS & HARES

An Urgent Concern



Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is a fatal virus that affects rabbits and hares (lagomorphs). The original strain of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) was detected in 1984 and only affects domesticated or

European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). In 2010, a new strain, RHDV2, was identified. RHDV2 can infect North American species of wild rabbits and hares in addition to domestic rabbits and was first detected in the U.S. in pet rabbits in 2018. In 2020, RHDV2 jumped to wild rabbits and hares in the

southwestern U.S., where it spread to six states within four months. In March 2020, RHDV2 killed domestic rabbits at a veterinary practice in New York City; this outbreak is believed to be contained. The most likely routes of reintroduction to New York are through transported domestic rabbits, internationally imported rabbit products, or people who travel to outbreak areas in the Southwest.

**FOR KNOWN RHDV2
OUTBREAK AREAS, SEE**

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd>

How RHDV2 Spreads

RHDV2 is extremely hardy, easily transmitted, and highly lethal to rabbits and hares. It does not infect humans or other animals like dogs or cats. Its fatality rate ranges from 40–80 percent. Surviving rabbits are contagious for 30 days or more and can continue to shed the virus in saliva, urine, and feces. RHDV2 spreads easily through direct contact between rabbits or contact with contaminated environments or objects. The virus can remain contagious for three or more months in a carcass or on inanimate objects (caging, bedding material, food, fur, clothing, shoes, or tires). Insects that have landed on infected rabbits or carcasses can also spread the virus, as can the feces of predators and scavengers that have eaten infected rabbit meat. RHDV2 can spread through wild populations quickly; it spread across Australia in less than two years.

Wild rabbits and hares fulfill a vital ecosystem function as a key food source for many predators. To protect New York's wildlife, it is critical to prevent RHDV2 from being introduced into the state.

If RHDV2 enters New York's wild rabbit and hare populations, it could be impossible to control and could result in significant population declines throughout the state, including the potential extinction of the vulnerable New England cottontail (<https://newenglandcottontail.org/>).

DEC is taking this threat seriously and encourages all New Yorkers to do their part to keep this lethal disease out of the state. **Please see the next page for ways you can help.**



John Major

Help keep RHDV2 out of NYS to protect wild rabbits and hares, a vital food source for many predators.

If you **keep domestic rabbits**:

- Prevent intermingling with other rabbits. If you get new rabbits, quarantine them for two weeks and use separate equipment and clothing to care for them.
- Do not take in stray rabbits nor allow other rabbit keepers to have contact with your rabbits without personal protective equipment (PPE), including latex gloves and surgical gowns.
- Avoid handling or touching other rabbits (live or dead).
- Dispose of used litter and droppings by bagging and including with household garbage; never dump litter or droppings on the ground outside pens.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling rabbits, litter, or droppings.
- Avoid traveling with your rabbits.
- Do not let your rabbits move freely outdoors, and **never release domestic rabbits into the wild**.
- Prevent wild rabbits from entering outdoor hutch areas.
- If a rabbit dies suddenly, contact your veterinarian, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets at (518) 457-3502 or <https://agriculture.ny.gov/contact-us>, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Veterinary Services at (518) 218-7540.

SYMPTOMS

Rabbits infected with RHDV2 often show few or no symptoms. Infected wild rabbits are simply found dead, occasionally with blood around the nose. Domestic rabbits may develop a fever and die suddenly within 12–36 hours after infection, or they may survive longer and develop depression, anorexia, reddening of the eyes, or respiratory symptoms.

If you are a **wildlife rehabilitator** who cares for wild rabbits:

- Do not keep domestic rabbits as pets or have contact with domestic rabbits.
- Maintain good disinfection techniques and change PPE between rabbit litters or individual rabbits.
- Report unusual rabbit mortalities to the DEC Wildlife Health Unit (see contact information below).

If you are a **rabbit or hare hunter**:

- Avoid contact with domestic rabbits.
- Beagle clubs should not use both wild and domestic rabbits for training.
- Avoid travel to states that have confirmed RHDV2 outbreaks; disinfect all gear after out-of-state travel with a 10 percent bleach solution: 1 part household bleach, 9 parts water.
- Properly dispose of rabbit carcasses and bury carcasses deep enough to prevent scavenging.
- Do not bring rabbit carcasses killed in other states to New York.
- Report unusual rabbit mortalities to the DEC Wildlife Health Unit.

If you are a **hiker, camper, or traveler**, and you have been to known RHDV2 outbreak areas (see <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd> for a map of current outbreak areas):

- Disinfect footwear with a 10 percent bleach solution (1 part household bleach, 9 parts water) before going afield in New York.

If you are a **concerned citizen**:

- Please report any unusual wild rabbit mortalities you encounter to the DEC Wildlife Health Unit. See <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6957.html> for more information.

CONTACT US

DEC Wildlife Health Unit

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
(518) 478-2203

Regional DEC Wildlife Offices:

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/about/558.html>