

# All Creatures Animal Hospital



## **RABBIT HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE VIRUS (RHDV<sub>2</sub>) INFORMATION**

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Variant 2 (RHDV<sub>2</sub>) is a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild rabbits caused by a Calicivirus. Classified as a foreign animal disease, RHDV<sub>2</sub> first appeared in the U.S. in 2019. To date, the current RHDV<sub>2</sub> outbreak has been identified in several states, and is now considered endemic in the West and Southwest. There have been several isolated cases in other states.

This virus is extremely contagious, and can be transmitted not only from rabbit to rabbit, but on food, in water, by insect vectors, and other contaminated materials. In many cases, the source of the infection in pet rabbits is not determined. The virus is highly stable and can remain active for months in varied temperatures and over distances.

The time from infection to first signs may be as long as 9 days. Infection with RHDV causes damage throughout internal organs and tissues and impairs clotting resulting in bleeding. Bleeding may be internal only or you may see it. Morbidity and mortality rates are very high (up to 100%), and symptoms range from lethargy and bloody discharge from multiple orifices to death within 36 hours. Death usually occurs either from liver failure or hemorrhage.

Vaccination has been available for many years in Europe. However, in October 2021, a vaccine manufacturing company in the US (Medgene) received emergency use authorization (EUA) from the USDA to offer a vaccine. The vaccine has been found 100% effective, and safe during trials in healthy young experimental rabbits. More information can be found on Medgene's website: <https://medgenelabs.com/rhdv2/>

Medgene's current recommended protocol is an initial two-dose regimen with the second dose 21 days after the first (with immunity by 14 days after the second dose), followed by a single-dose annual booster. Additional studies are continuing to understand the duration of immunity.

Side effects include slight fever, lethargy, reduced appetite, and swelling or pain at the site of the injection. It should be kept in mind that more serious side effects may be identified as larger numbers of pet rabbits of various ages and health status receive the vaccine. Any adverse reactions must be reported to Medgene Labs. The lab is required to report them to the USDA-CVB. In our experience, mild reactions have occurred the evening after receiving the vaccine. All rabbits recovered and were back to normal activity and appetite the following morning.

As of July 2022, All Creatures Animal Hospital has administered over 130 vaccines to over 70 rabbits. We will require an exam on any rabbit who has not been seen in the last 12 months. Otherwise, your rabbit will get a brief exam followed by the vaccine. You will be required to sign a waiver for both vaccines. After your rabbit receives the vaccine, you will be asked to remain in the clinic for 30 minutes to monitor to any vaccine reactions. Please call the clinic to schedule an appointment for the vaccine. The vaccine is given in 2 doses 3 weeks apart with full protection 2 weeks after the booster. Payment for both vaccines is required at the time the first vaccine is given. All rabbits receiving the vaccine are sent home with 2 doses of Meloxicam (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory) to be given if a mild reaction occurs once the rabbit returns home. I highly recommend vaccinating against this deadly virus.

Additional sources on RHDV<sub>2</sub> infection and vaccination can be found at: House Rabbit Society (<https://rabbit.org/rhdv/>) and American Veterinary Medical Association (<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease>).