

# RHDV2 Guidance for Wildlife Rehabilitators

## IMPORTANT NOTICE: RABBIT HEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2 (RHDV-2) was confirmed in a domestic rabbit facility in Sanpete county on 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2020. It is likely that the disease has spilled over into the free-ranging rabbit population.

RHDV-2 is a highly pathogenic and contagious calicivirus affecting rabbits and closely related species; it does not infect other animals or people and is **not related to the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19**.

First identified in domestic rabbits in Europe, we now know that RHDV-2 will infect native North American species. Outbreaks in wild rabbits in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Texas since early March 2020 already have caused extensive losses of cottontails and jackrabbits in affected areas, perhaps numbering in the tens of thousands of mortalities.

This virus is very hardy and will remain infectious on the surfaces of objects, on clothing, and in tissues for a significant amount of time. It may be spread between rabbits by inhalation, contact with contaminated equipment, flies and other insects (mechanically), contact with urine or feces from infected rabbits, and contact with feces from predators that have eaten infected rabbits. There is no specific treatment and the disease is often fatal in native rabbits (potentially 75% to ~100%). Rabbits that don't die immediately may have a poor appetite, inactivity, fever, and a bloody nose.

### Recommendations for wildlife rehabilitators accepting cottontails and jackrabbits:

- Carefully triage all rabbits upon arrival and separate the ones with injuries from those that appear ill.
- Record the source and location of any rabbits admitted to the facility.
- Report mortalities to your local Utah Division of Wildlife Resources office.
- Clean and disinfect (1:10 solution of household bleach after cleaning) all surfaces and equipment; use disposable gowns or aprons, and gloves for handling rabbits.
- Protect feed from flies, birds, and rodents.
- Control biting flies, and other insects.
- If instructed to dispose of carcasses, either incinerate or bury them deep enough to prevent scavenging.
- Infected rabbits may shed the virus for more than 30 days; recovered rabbits may only be released upon approval from your local Area Wildlife Manager into approved locations.

For additional information:

<https://ag.utah.gov/farmers/animal-industry/animal-health-program/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease/>  
[http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit\\_hemorrhagic\\_disease.pdf](http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit_hemorrhagic_disease.pdf)

[https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal\\_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf)

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