Division of Animal Industry
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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Commissioner Wilton Simpson

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Update

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THIS ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE UPDATED AS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS CONFIRMED AND AS INVESTIGATION RESULTS RETURN.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) has confirmed Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus, Type 2 (RHDV-2) in 5 domestic rabbits since 2020. There have been no detections in wild rabbits in the state. Surveillance and testing of suspect animals continues throughout Florida. FDACS encourages rabbit owners and producers to contact their veterinarian to discuss vaccination of their rabbits for RHDV-2. For additional information regarding the vaccine, please visit Medgene's website. For additional information, please click here.

Rabbit owners should continue to take prudent biosecurity measures, including not purchasing hay or other commodities originating in RHDV-2 affected states. For a map of RHDV-2 endemic states, visit the USDA website at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd.

FDACS encourages continued assistance with reporting mortalities, which are submitted for surveillance testing as warranted. Sick or dead wild rabbits should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Wildlife Health Hotline: (866) 293-9282 or WildlifeHealthTeam@MyFWC.com. RHDV-2 remains classified as a foreign animal disease. Therefore, suspect, sick or dead domestic rabbits should be reported to the Division of Animal Industry at RAD@FDACS.gov or calling (850) 410-0900. Testing rabbits is key to monitoring the disease spread.

Genetic sequencing of the RHDV-2 from the two confirmed cases in Florida indicates this virus matches those identified in rabbits in the Southwest United States.

RHDV is an extremely contagious and often fatal viral disease of domesticated and wild rabbits. There are three forms of the RHDV virus. RHDV-2 is believed to infect all ages of domestic rabbits but less deadly than types RHDV and RHDVa. RHDV-2 is both stable and infectious in the environment for long periods of time, potentially surviving more than 3 months without a host.

The first sign of infection with RHDV is often sudden and unexpected death in previously healthy rabbits. Those that do not die immediately may demonstrate poor appetite, depression, inactivity, and listlessness; a fever and bloody nasal discharge may be noted. Later signs relate to organ failure and include jaundice, respiratory distress, diarrhea, weight loss, bloating, and death. Rabbits surviving infection are believed to shed the virus for at least 30 days, but in experimental cases, they shed the virus for up to 105 days. Long term/permanent shedding is unlikely. Exposed and surviving rabbits have immunity to that viral strain for an unknown amount of time.

- All rabbits imported into Florida from a non-RHDV affected state are required to have an Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (OCVI) dated within 30 days of entry (see Animal Movement Page, https://www.FDACS.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Livestock/Animal-Movement)

- ALL SUSCEPTIBLE ANIMALS IMPORTED FROM A RHDV AFFECTED STATE MUST HAVE AN OCVI DATED WITHIN 72 HOURS OF ENTRY AND A VETERINARY STATEMENT
    - Florida Administrative Code, 5C-3

5C-3.015 Rabbits.

(1) All Lagomorphs originating from a state that has had RHD diagnosed in wild or domestic animals in the past twenty-four (24) months, are required to be accompanied by an Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection. The OCVI must include the statement in subsection 5C- 3.015(2), F.A.C. and be signed and dated by the examining veterinarian within seventy-two (72) hours prior to entry into Florida.

(2) The OCVI must include the following statement from the examining veterinarian, "All animals on this shipment have not been exposed to a known or suspected case of RHD and show no clinical signs of diseases on the inspection date of (inspection/examination date)."

Rulemaking Authority 570.07(21), (23), 585.08(2)(a) FS. Law Implemented 585.08(1), 585.145

FS. History–New 1-31-21.

Biosecurity is the key to prevention of RHDV:

- Keep a closed rabbitry.
- Exclude wild and feral rabbits from the rabbitry.
- Wash your hands between handling rabbits in different pens.
- Control flies and biting insects.
- Clean and disinfect equipment, tools, footwear, feed and water containers, and cages. Recommended disinfectants include those in the phenol class or 10 percent bleach. Clean thoroughly with soap and water first and apply disinfectant for recommended contact time. Rinse well and allow to dry before allowing animal contact.

- House rabbits indoors if possible.
- Do not share equipment with others who raise rabbits.
- Contact your veterinarian if sick or dead rabbits are observed and submit carcasses for examination and prompt sampling.
- Do not transport rabbits into or out of RHDV quarantine areas.
- Separate new rabbits or those returning from shows for one month.

Additional disease resources:

Iowa State
- http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/rabbit_hemorrhagic_disease.pdf

National Wildlife Health Center
- USGS RHDV Resources

USDA
- https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/epidemiology/risk-identification
- https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-rhdv2.pdf
- https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-map

EPA (Information on disinfectant products)
- https://www.epa.gov/pesticides/epa-and-usda-release-information-mitigating-rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease-virus-rhdv2