



**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES**  
**COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED**

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**Rabbit Hemorrhagic  
Disease Update**

September 16, 2021

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

Updates 9/16/2021: The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) was notified that a single premise in Mississippi had confirmed cases of RHDV-2 in domestic rabbits. The investigations are ongoing and FDACS is monitoring the situation closely.

Due to the proximity of the current outbreaks, FDACS is approving the importation of RHDV vaccine by licensed, accredited veterinarians for use in our rabbit population on a case-by-case basis. Rabbit producers should contact their veterinarian. Please visit: [Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease FAQs](#). Veterinarians should follow the step-by-step process for FDACS and USDA approval as instructed in the [RHDV-2 Vaccine Order Instructions](#).

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 [wildlifehealth@myFWC.com](mailto:wildlifehealth@myFWC.com). Sick or dead domestic rabbits should be reported to the Division of Animal Industry at [RAD@FDACS.gov](mailto:RAD@FDACS.gov) or calling (850) 410-0900.

For a map of affected states visit the USDA website at:  
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/SA-Epidemiology-AnimalHealth-CEAH/Risk+Identification>.

**Summary of RHDV-2 Testing**

County	Domestic Rabbits – Negative	Wild Rabbits – Negative	Domestic Rabbits – Positive	Wild Rabbits – Positive
<b>Lake</b>	X (feral)		<b>X (12/30/2020)</b>	
Lee		X		
Manatee	(3)			
Palm Beach		X		
Volusia	X			
Putnam	X			

## Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease and New Emergency Rule for Importation of Rabbits

Duval	x			
Pinellas	x	x		
Orange		(5)		
Polk		x		
Collier		x		

We currently have no evidence that the virus has spread to domestic or wild rabbits from the one infected Florida premises. On December 30, 2020, FDACS was notified of a single premises that had rabbit mortality and tested positive for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Type 2 (RHDV-2). The premises was cleaned and disinfected, and the investigation is ongoing. The source of the virus has not yet been determined and there are no other confirmed or suspect cases in Florida at this time. Healthy wild rabbits continue to be observed in the surrounding area of the premises.

The index premises was released from quarantine following final cleaning and disinfection on April 28, 2021. No additional cases of RHDV-2 have been identified; however, rabbit owners should continue to take prudent biosecurity measures, including not purchasing hay or other commodities originating in RHDV-2 affected states.

Genetic sequencing of the RHDV-2 from the single positive case 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. As of today, RHDV-2 has been confirmed in Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wyoming, and Cuba in 2020-2021. RHDV-2 was identified in Washington in 2019. RHDV-2 is both stable and infectious in the environment for long periods of time, potentially surviving more than 3 months without a host.

RHDV-2 remains classified as a foreign animal disease. Therefore, suspect RHDV-2 should be reported to the Division of Animal Industry at [RAD@FDACS.gov](mailto:RAD@FDACS.gov) or calling (850) 410-0900. Testing rabbits is key to monitoring the disease spread. RHDV-2 has been observed as high mortality events in multiple species of wild (free-ranging) rabbits in the affected states as well. Wild rabbits introduced into domestic populations have also served as a disease source to the domestic rabbits. Sick wild rabbits should not be introduced to a premises with domestic rabbits. Sick or dead wild rabbits should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Wildlife Health Hotline: (866) 293-9282.

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; they will have 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.

## Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease and New Emergency Rule for Importation of Rabbits

- 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 effective January 31, 2021
  - <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ChapterHome.asp?Chapter=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.

Unfortunately, there are currently no USDA licensed vaccines for this disease, although RHDV2 vaccines are available overseas. The Division of Animal Industry is working with the USDA to determine if vaccine approval and use in Florida is warranted. If use is approved, we will announce it to veterinarians and post information to our home page.