



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Karen Ross, Secretary

Recommended Caution for California Rabbit Exhibitions

May 26, 2021

Dear Rabbit Exhibition Organizers and Managers:

This advisory is in response to numerous questions about the current risk of spreading rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD) via rabbits at fairs and shows. We are posting this advisory now because of the recent increase of disease spread in southern California and the United States, and the risks created by fairs and shows. We urge rabbit owners to prevent this devastating disease by practicing good biosecurity measures and limiting comingling with other rabbits and their owners. They should also avoid moving or sharing equipment which may serve to transfer virus. Rabbit owners who have experienced recent deaths in their rabbit colony should not attend shows or exhibitions.

Since March 2020, an outbreak of RHD has been spreading in wild and domestic rabbits in the southwestern United States and is now affecting 13 U.S. states. It was detected in southern California in May 2020 and has since been killing wild and/or domestic rabbits in seven Southern California counties: Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura.

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is caused by a highly contagious and highly fatal calicivirus of rabbits and hares. The primary ways the disease spreads is by movement of infected or exposed rabbits, direct or indirect contact with infected wild and domestic rabbits, movement of rabbit carcasses by scavengers or predators, contamination of hay or feed by infected wild rabbits, or contact with virus on fomites (surfaces) such as hands, shoes, clothing, or feet and fur of rodents and other animals. Clinical signs of rabbit hemorrhagic disease include; sudden death, lethargy, inappetence, seizures/spasms, blood from the nose or other body orifices, difficulty breathing, and vocalization. For more information, please visit https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/AHFSS/Animal_Health/RHD.html

To support our disease containment efforts, the California State Veterinarian is recommending that all rabbit exhibitions practice good biosecurity and health screening of all participating rabbits. The cooperation of rabbit owners is critical in controlling this disease; when exposed rabbits are not moved and comingled, disease is prevented. *An exhibition is an assembly of rabbits brought to the assembly location for purposes that include public display for any duration. Exhibitions include, but are not limited to: sales, auctions, shows, swap meets, pet marts, fair exhibits, pet stores, and petting zoos. Public zoos are not included in this definition.*

Sincerely,

Dr. Annette Jones
State Veterinarian

