

## Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV2) Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2?

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2 (RHDV2) is a highly fatal calicivirus that affects Lagomorphs (hares, rabbits and pikas). RHDV2 is a Foreign Animal Disease. In North America, RHDV2 has been confirmed in the wild in black-tailed jackrabbits, desert cottontail rabbits, mountain cottontail rabbits, and antelope jackrabbits.

### Where has RHDV2 been found?

The first cases of RHDV2 in North America occurred in domestic and feral rabbits in 2018 in Ohio and British Columbia, Canada. Isolated cases in domestic and feral rabbits were subsequently confirmed in Washington State and in domestic rabbits in Arizona, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. RHDV2 was first confirmed in wild black-tailed jackrabbits and cotton tailed rabbits in the Southwestern United States in April of 2020. Over the following year, RHDV2 was detected in most of the western United States as well as the states of Texas, Florida, and Arkansas. As of April 2021, the disease has not been detected in Michigan.

For a map of current affected states and rabbit types, please visit:

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd>

### How do I know if a rabbit has RHDV2?

Sudden mortality in otherwise healthy rabbits is characteristic of RHDV2. Die-offs in wild rabbits can involve single to multiple rabbits. Dead rabbits often appear externally normal aside from bloody discharge coming from the nostrils and/or mouth (Figure 1). Rabbits are not normally observed sick prior to death but sick rabbits may be lethargic and reluctant to move. Infected rabbits die within 1 day to 2 weeks after becoming infected. The virus kills 70-90% of infected rabbits.



Figure 1. Bloody discharge from a rabbit's nose, characteristic of RHDV2. Photo credit: Karen Fox, Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

**How is RHDV2 spread?**

RHDV2 is highly contagious and can spread through direct contact with infected rabbits or indirectly through contact with infected carcasses, blood, urine, and feces. In domestic rabbits the virus can also be spread on contaminated surfaces such as cages, feed, water, and bedding. Mechanical vectors, such as insects, scavengers, predators, and birds can also spread the virus.

**How long can the virus live in the environment?**

RHDV2 is very persistent and stable in the environment and is resistant to extreme temperatures. The virus can survive up to 15 weeks in dry conditions and can survive freezing.

**What wildlife species are susceptible to RHDV2?**

Only Lagomorphs are susceptible to RHDV2, which in Michigan would include wild snowshoe hares and Eastern cottontail rabbits. No other species of wildlife are susceptible.

**Can RHDV2 infect humans?**

RHDV2 only affects Lagomorphs. Humans are not susceptible. However, the DNR highly discourages the consumption of sick wildlife.

**What should I do if I find a sick or dead rabbit?**

If you find sick or dead rabbits, please contact your local DNR Field Office or the DNR Wildlife Disease Lab at 517-336-5030.

**Where can I go for more information on RHDV2?**

Up to date information on RHDV2 can be found on [United States Department of Agriculture APHIS](#) webpage.