



**There IS NO CURE.  
There is no approved vaccine  
available in the United States.  
Prevention is our only defense  
against this deadly virus.**

## **A Message To Veterinarians**

The foreign rabbit disease Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease, (RHD), was confirmed by USDA/APHIS within the United States for a third time, on December 11, 2001, in Flushing New York. RHD is a serious threat to domestic rabbits. It is important that veterinarians are knowledgeable of the disease and aware of proper protocol should suspicious cases be presented elsewhere.

RHD is an extremely contagious virus transmitted by direct contact with infected rabbits, or by indirect contact with objects contaminated by the virus. The morbidity rate is 90%. Infection can result in an acute fever, cause hepatic necrosis, enteritis, and lymphoid necrosis, followed by massive hemorrhage of at least one major organ. Rabbits die acutely within 6 to 48 hours of onset. However there are three forms, one with symptoms as noted, one where no symptoms appear and the Rabbit simply dies, and one that the Rabbit shows some distress and completely recovers. Rabbits of the last group are known to become carriers, for a period thought to range from 4 to 8 weeks. There are reports from the OIE, (Office of International Epizooties) of a chronic form that includes catarrhal enteritis. The OIE also notes that the chronic form and a subclinical form are characterized by severe and generalized jaundice, weight loss and lethargy. Death occurs in two weeks in these forms. These two forms have been reported through observation of rabbits in outbreaks and effects 5 to 10 percent of infected rabbits.

Anyone who visits countries where RHD is endemic is at risk to bring this disease into US borders. The virus can live on clothing for 48 hours at a temperature of 140 degrees and for 4 days at a temperature of 70 degrees. The rabbits of tourists may die within days of their arrival home. So will any other rabbits with whom they have contact. There are NO quarantines or RHD free certificates required of rabbits being imported into the USA. The USA regularly imports rabbits and rabbit items (fur, pelts, meat) into this country from RHD-positive countries.

Veterinarians are asked to educate themselves concerning this lethal disease. For those without Internet access, please call to have OIE's 16 page report on this disease, or any of our other information packages.

## **RHD in the US Coalition**

The RHD in the US Coalition was formed in November 1999 in order to address concerns regarding the potential spread of RHD to and within the US. The coalition is a broad-spectrum organization, in that it consists of members from the House Rabbit Society, rescue, production rabbitries, and show rabbit people. The Coalition is committed to:

- Educating all who have rabbits in their lives
- Educate the general public, who as tourists or in other situations, may come in contact with RHD, while traveling
- Urge that stricter precautions be enforced at US borders regarding the import/export of rabbits or rabbit products.

For an extensive compilation of RHD related documents, and a network for alerts and news service, please visit

[www.vhdcoalition.org](http://www.vhdcoalition.org)

**Or call**

**1.800.906.2445**