

RHD Quick Facts

- There have been three confirmed incidents of the foreign animal disease, RHD, (Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease), in the US. RHD is also known as VHD and RCD. The first outbreak was announced in April of 2000. Twenty-five died through infection and two others were euthanized to prevent spread. In August of 2001, a second outbreak was confirmed in Utah, which effected rabbits in Idaho, Illinois, and Montana. Eradication efforts claimed the death of over 4000 rabbits. A third outbreak was reported on December 11, 2001 in Flushing, New York involving 8 Rabbits. Two of those died of the disease, the other six were euthanized.
- The symptoms, and mortality disease differs between outbreaks. Factors such as the amount of exposure create incubation periods between 18 and 48 hours. The disease does not affect Rabbits under 4 weeks old. The mortality rate is lower in rabbits between 4 weeks and 8 weeks old and those over 8 years old, though any exposed become carriers for up to 8 weeks. Symptoms range from sudden death, loss of appetite, upper and lower respiratory illness, spasms, lethargy, fever, blue color to the lips and mucous membranes, jaundice, bleeding from nose, rectum, and mouth. Chronic and sub acute versions may create the symptoms mentioned above, with death occurring in two weeks. The cause of death is massive internal hemorrhaging of one or more organs in the acute form, liver failure in the chronic sub-acute forms. Chronic cases may also present diarrhea.
- The means of transmission are oral, respiratory and through scrapes and abrasions. RHD remains a viable infecting agent for 105 days when kept at 68 degrees and 2 days at 140 degrees when placed dry on cloth. Infecting agents can therefore become anything that comes in contact with it. Sick and dead Animals, as well as the feces of those who are infected are all agents of transmission. To disinfect surfaces for RHD a 10% bleach solution or a disinfectant for Parvo viruses are recommended. When using a bleach solution, the solution must not be rinsed for ten minutes. Commercial disinfectants should be used as per directions.
- Show rabbits are especially vulnerable due to their high exposure to other rabbits, and people, during shows. Judges cannot wear gloves and judge wool. The carpets rabbits are placed on during judging could expose them to the virus left by carriers. Disinfectants must either dry or sit on surfaces for 10 minutes to be effective, to long to be practical in judging situations. Despite earlier plans to do so, shows have not been cancelled after outbreaks in the areas where they have occurred.
- No precautions exist to keep RHD out of the U.S. The USDA does not quarantine, or require health certificates for, rabbits. Shipments of rabbits, wool and yarn, and other products are imported from infected countries. Vaccines that are available elsewhere in the world are not approved for use in the US. RHD is not a reportable disease on State or Federal levels, though State and Federal officials will investigate and contain outbreaks. If RHD is suspected it is recommended that you or your Vet contact the State Vet.
- Scientific research, some conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture, has shown that Caliciviruses are widespread in U.S. livestock. These are the family of viruses from which RHD comes. It is possible that some U.S. rabbits have developed some natural immunity. This may be why there have been sporadic outbreaks. Rabbits with immunity may have come in contact with RHD and not been infected. They may then have passed the virus on to rabbits without immunity. This possibility has not been researched. Nor has the health risk these viruses impose on rabbits. Rabbits with diarrhea, respiratory illness, fertility problems, liver disease or heart problems may be suffering from Calicivirus infection. As may other animals.
- Though not globally considered a threat to human health, studies show that people exposed to the disease developed an increase above norm of illness ranging from flu symptoms to headaches. The Center for Disease Control is monitoring humans health in the U.S. They consider the risk to be minimal. No other species are thought to be susceptible, though no definitive research has been done. Exposed animals should be monitored.
- The RHD in the US Coalition is a group comprised of rabbit breeders, fosterers and pet owners. Our goals are to create safeguards and educate as many people as possible to help stop the threat of RHD.

Visit www.vhdcoalition.org, Or Call 800.906.2445 To Stay Informed And To Join Efforts To Stop RHD.