



Bunny Alert!

Rabbit Caretakers are currently being advised to be on alert for any unusual health problems or sudden deaths. Three confirmed outbreaks of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease, (RHD), have occurred in less than two years here in the US. The US has been RHD free until recently. Suddenly a case was found in Iowa claiming the lives of twenty seven Rabbits, in April of 2000. Since the original US outbreak, two other cases have been confirmed by the USDA, (US Department of Agriculture).

The second case occurred in Utah at a rabbit farm in August of 2001. This outbreak affected rabbits in Montana and Indiana as well. Rabbits from the original site were sold to other breeders, thereby potentially infecting all rabbits at the facilities in the other states. Over four thousand rabbits lost their lives in this incident, primarily through eradication efforts.

The third case occurred in December of 2001, at a zoo in Flushing New York, managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society. Eight rabbits died as a result of this outbreak.

RHD is a very contagious virus, that is extremely stable in the environment. It remains an infective agent for 105 days at a temperature of 68°. Scientists suspect that it can be transported by insects and dust as well as by rabbits and other animals who have come in

contact with it.

Eighty percent of rabbits die within 48 hours of contact. The cause of death is hemorrhaging of at least one major organ, however this may not be visible. Rabbits under eight weeks and over eight years are not as susceptible to the virus as rabbits between those ages. Rabbits under four weeks are not susceptible. However, rabbits who do not die of the disease do become carriers and can infect other rabbits. In outbreaks, five to ten percent of the rabbits infected develop forms of the disease that create symptoms including jaundice, weight loss, and lethargy. Some develop diarrhea with mucous in the feces. Rabbits with these forms of the disease usually die within two weeks of liver failure.

Rabbit caretakers are being asked to contact their Veterinarian or the State Veterinarian in the case of any suspicious deaths. Rabbits who die suddenly with no apparent symptoms should be necropsied to rule out RHD.

There are no vaccines available in the U.S., and there is no cure. The only defense we have is prevention. Rabbits should be kept indoors, and contact with other rabbits should not be allowed. This is especially true in areas where outbreaks have occurred.

To learn more about RHD and how to safeguard the rabbits in your life you are encouraged to contact the RHD in the U.S. Coalition. The Coalition has created educational material and an alert system. To receive this material and to be notified of actions being taken by the Coalition to safeguard the rabbits of the U.S., as well as to be

advised of any new outbreaks, visit their website at www.vhdcoalition.org or call 800.906.2445.