

General Biosecurity Recommendations for Rabbits

Biosecurity measures, which are practices intended to reduce the spread of infectious diseases, are an essential component in protecting animal health. The following biosecurity measures may reduce the risk of the spread of many infectious diseases in rabbits including rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD).

For additional guidance, rabbit breeders / owners can refer to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) [National Farm-Level Biosecurity Planning Guide Proactive Management of Animal Resources](#)

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD) is a serious viral disease of European rabbits that spreads easily and quickly in susceptible rabbit populations. Many domestic (pet) rabbit breeds are derived from the European rabbit and susceptible to infection. High rates of illness and death can occur in exposed rabbits. The virus spreads among rabbits through secretions including saliva, runny eyes and nose, urine, feces and contaminated bedding, food and water. It can also be spread by humans, wildlife and insects on contaminated clothing, fur, and other surfaces. The virus can survive for long periods of time in the environment and remain infectious to animals.

The disease does not affect humans and is not known to affect other animals. In Canada, RHD has occurred infrequently in domestic rabbit populations and federally is an immediately notifiable disease; laboratories are required to notify the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) on the suspicion or diagnosis of the disease

Some key biosecurity measures include:

People and equipment

- Minimize access to the premises and restrict contact with rabbits to only those people necessary for their care.
- Post biosecurity signage to advise potential visitors that access to the property and animals is restricted.
- Require that all essential visitors (e.g. veterinarians or service personnel):
 - obtain approval before their visit;
 - understand and implement established biosecurity protocols;
 - fill out a visitor log; and
 - be accompanied.
- Secure access to animal housing areas by locking gates and doors.
- Wash or sanitize hands, clean and disinfect boots and wear farm / premises dedicated clothing before caring for rabbits.
- Do not share equipment with other rabbit breeders / owners.
- Clean and disinfect equipment, waterers, feeders and other items coming into contact with rabbits. Follow the directions supplied by the disinfectant manufacturer and rinse waterers and feeders thoroughly before refilling.
- Reduce the potential spread of disease by avoiding travel to areas experiencing disease outbreaks.

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Animals

- Routinely monitor (a minimum of once per day) rabbits for signs of illness including:
 - difficulty breathing, loss of coordination, reduced appetite, and reduced activity;
 - bleeding from the nose, blood in the feces, hemorrhages in eye; and
 - sudden death with few clinical signs
- Vaccinate (when available) animals against disease. While vaccines for RHD are not readily available in Canada vaccine guidelines are currently under review by the CFIA.
- Prevent contact of rabbits with domestic, wild rabbits and other animals.
- Manage and minimize exposure to insects.
- Manage and minimize the use of outdoor exercise areas for rabbits.
- Consider disease risks when attending rabbit shows or fairs due to exposure to potentially sick animals.
- Limit the introduction of new rabbits: rabbits that appear healthy can be infected and pose a risk to resident animals.
- Isolate all returning show / new rabbits from contact with resident animals for a period of time to ensure they are healthy. A minimum period of 14 days is recommended. To protect against RHD, isolate for 60 days.
- During this period manage isolated rabbits separately.
 - provide care for the isolated rabbits only after handling the resident animals;
 - prevent physical and indirect contact (e.g. do not use of the same equipment) between show and resident animals;
 - closely monitor the health status of isolated and resident animals during the isolation period; and
 - seek veterinary guidance if there are signs of disease

Feed, water, bedding

- Obtain feed from suppliers with quality control programs.
- Do not collect and use wild plants as a food source.
- Use municipal water sources. Surface water sources and shallow wells are not recommended due to the increased risk of contamination.
- Protect feed and bedding from contamination by storing inside and/or in tightly sealed containers.
- Clean up feed spills.