

Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus

Rabbit Haemorrhagic disease is an invariably fatal illness which can be contracted by your pet rabbit if in contact with wild rabbits.

The disease can be caused by multiple caliciviruses which exist in wild rabbit populations in New Zealand.

Calicivirus strains

- RHV1 has been widespread throughout wild rabbit populations in New Zealand since 1997.
- A second variant called RHDV1 was released with the approval of MPI in March 2018, as part of a nationwide plan to control wild rabbit populations.
- A third strain, known as RHDV2, has been detected in deceased wild rabbits since 2017. The geographic extent of this variant has not yet been determined and hence the risk to companion rabbits is unknown.

How is the virus transmitted?

Transmission occurs mostly when pet rabbits come into contact with wild rabbits, or with infectious secretions from the eyes, nose and mouth, as well as urine and faeces. Vectors such as flies, fleas, birds and mosquitos can also be potential carriers of the virus.

Signs of disease

Infection with the virus causes rapid onset hepatitis (liver disease) with consequent failure of multiple organs systems. Death often occurs within 48 hours. Although

treatment is rarely successful, if you see any signs of serious illness in your rabbit, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Protection with vaccination

You can protect your pet rabbit from contracting calicivirus with an annual vaccination. There are two vaccines available:

- Cylap RD vaccine – provides immunity against RHDV1 and RHDV K5. This vaccine is readily available in NZ. Kittens should receive their first vaccination at 10-12 weeks and a booster vaccination every 12 months to maintain immunity.
- Filovac vaccine – provides immunity against all 3 strains. Unfortunately Filovac is difficult and costly to obtain in NZ but if you are interested in having the vaccine imported, please give us a call.

Other ways to minimise the risk

- move pet rabbits away from areas where there is the potential for contact with wild rabbits.
- Maintain excellent hand hygiene when handling between rabbits.
- Implement insect control plans and treat prophylactically for fleas.
- Avoid cutting grass and feeding to rabbits.
- Clean and disinfect rabbit cages and hutches well.

*For more information,
please contact us in clinic.*