



## **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2) Shows & Exhibitions Guidance Document**

**This document was developed by a subcommittee of the National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials. It has been customized to the needs of Vermont and was last updated on July 29, 2020. Further updates will be made as needed to remain pertinent during this evolving situation.**

### **Background**

Decisions regarding whether to hold rabbit commingling events like 4-H club meetings, exhibitions and shows must consider Governor Scott's COVID-19 executive order (EO) regarding maximum sizes of gatherings, which changes periodically. If planners determine the event is compliant with the EO and decide to schedule it, biosecurity practices should be maintained on-site. Following biosecurity practices is the best way to protect rabbits during a show or exhibition but doing so effectively can be challenging. The overall biosecurity plan for any event is only as good as the least diligent exhibitor or participant; unanimous participation ensures maximum protection for participating rabbits. Strong biosecurity practices protect rabbits not only from RHD but also from more common contagious conditions such as Pasteurella, mites, etc.

### **General Requirements and Recommendations**

- Consider postponing or cancelling shows in infected or high-risk states during an outbreak. Vermont is not currently an infected or high-risk state, but all rabbit owners and handlers must remain diligent to maintain Vermont's low-risk status, including establishing strong biosecurity practices at all rabbit commingling events held within our state.
- Currently, there are no quarantined premises in Vermont because we have no suspect or confirmed RHDV2 cases in our state. If a premises or geographic region is placed under official state quarantine, authorized by the Vermont State Veterinarian, movement of rabbits, rabbit products, and equipment from quarantine areas to shows or exhibitions would be prohibited.
- It is up to each rabbit show's management to evaluate their risks and decide what parameters they would like to establish and enforce.
- It is recommended that all rabbits be examined by a veterinarian prior to event entry or that a certificate of veterinary inspection is issued within several days of arrival to the event.
- Check with the Vermont State Veterinarian at (802)828-2421 for additional guidance or recommendations based on risk.

## Interstate Movement

- Each state has different import requirements for rabbits. Vermont does not have state-mandated import requirements for domestic rabbits, but all individuals or businesses planning to acquire new rabbits should ensure those animals are free of signs of contagious disease as determined by a veterinarian. This assurance will help protect resident domestic rabbits by lowering the risk of disease introduction.
- Rabbits should never be imported into Vermont from regions or states affected by RHDV2.
- When exporting domestic rabbits, check with the state of destination for health and traceability requirements and adhere to them consistently.
- The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife regulates the intentional movement of wild rabbits into and within Vermont, and questions regarding those movements should be directed to that department.

## Biosecurity Recommendations

In addition to recommendations found in the *Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Biosecurity Document*, consider additional protective measures for exhibition animals:

- Showing
  - Judges, veterinarians and other officials interacting with rabbits from multiple colonies should change gloves or wash hands/arms between animals.
  - Judges should wear short sleeves and avoid picking up rabbits to avoid contamination of their clothing.
  - Do not share show carpets and designate one per animal.
  - Be sure the show has excellent vector control. Flies, rats, cats, dogs, birds, etc. can move the virus around on their feet or bodies.
  - Be sure the show has a designated isolation area for rabbits that become ill on the premises and cannot be removed immediately.
- Animal Health
  - Do not take sick rabbits to a show or other commingling event.
  - While on site at an event, monitor your rabbits closely for signs of illness (going off feed, looking limp/depressed, or behavioral changes).
  - Immediately remove sick rabbits from the premises. If sick rabbits cannot be removed immediately, they should be kept in a designated isolation area away from other rabbits and managed in a biosecure manner.
- Housing
  - Keep show rabbits in cages off the ground.
  - Never allow nose to nose contact between rabbits.
  - Clean and disinfect all housing and feeding/grooming/other equipment at least daily if possible.
  - Do not allow your rabbit to exercise in common areas on the ground.
  - Do not allow non-showing spectators into the rabbit areas; fence off the show area.

- Human Best Practices
  - Wash your hands frequently while at the event.
  - Wear different clothes and shoes at the show than you do at home and before contacting the rest of your herd.
  - Do not share equipment, grooming tools, or feeding implements.
  - Wash hands before and after handling or caring for rabbits and between groups.
  - Do not handle others' rabbits, and do not allow others to handle your animals.
- Cleaning and Disinfection
  - \*Clean and disinfect equipment and common grooming stations (See [USDA C&D guidance](#))
    - Cleaning
      - Remove all visible organic debris from items to be disinfected (cages, feeding equipment, waterers, etc.). Items made of wood are very difficult to clean effectively and their use should be avoided.
      - Wash items thoroughly with soap and water; rinse well and let dry.
    - Disinfection
      - Saturate by submersion or spray with 10% household bleach (sodium hypochlorite) in a well ventilated area.
      - Allow 10 minutes of contact, then rinse and let dry before allowing animal contact.
- Feeding
  - Source hay from unaffected areas.
  - Keep feed covered or in a container with a lid while at the show.
  - Do not share feed, water or treats with other exhibitors.
- Going Home
  - Clean and disinfect all cages, equipment and transportation after the show and before use at home.
  - Isolate all rabbits returning from the event for 30 days prior to reintroduction to the resident rabbits.
  - Feed and care for returning rabbits last.
  - Report any mortality or morbidity events to your veterinarian.