

Precautions for Hunters and Falconers:

- If you observe sick or dead rabbits in an area, do not hunt, run dogs, or fly falconry birds in that area. Contact the state conservation agency for that state immediately. In Arkansas, please send reports to agfc.health@agfc.ar.gov.
- Avoid traveling to hunt in areas where RHDV-2 outbreaks have been recently documented. For a map of known RHDV-2 affected areas, please visit www.agfc.com/riskid.
- Hunters who own domestic rabbits should wash or change clothing, including footwear, after handling wild rabbits before coming into contact with domestic animals.
- Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals.
- Bag any remains and dispose of them in trash destined for a landfill, if local ordinances prohibit the disposal of game carcasses in landfills, remains can be buried deep enough to prevent contact with wild rabbits and scavengers. Disposal at or near the site of harvest is recommended.
- After handling game, wash hands thoroughly with soap or disinfectant, and disinfect knives, equipment, and surfaces that were in contact with game.
- All game should be thoroughly cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees.
- Never feed materials from wildlife that appear sick, are found dead, or test positive for a contagious disease to people or pets, including falconry birds.

Movement of Live Rabbits:

- Importing domestic rabbits into Arkansas, except when moving directly to a USDA-licensed slaughter facility, requires a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection. This includes the movement of all pet, show, and production rabbits not intended for immediate slaughter.
- Many states are implementing movement restrictions for rabbits. If you plan to travel with live rabbits, contact the state agriculture authority in the state of destination and all states through which you plan to travel to ensure compliance with pertinent state regulations.
- Avoid transporting wild rabbits for release into training pens or for field trials, especially if sick or dead rabbits have been observed in the area.
- If you have transported a wild rabbit to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator, disinfect or dispose of any cages, boxes, or other materials that may have come into contact with the animal.
- The importation of live wild rabbits into Arkansas for any purpose requires an Importation Permit and Certificate of Veterinary Inspection. Please contact AGFC at 501-223-6300 for more information.

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease



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What is Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease?

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is a highly contagious, often fatal disease caused by a group of caliciviruses that affect domestic and wild rabbits. Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) has been recognized since the 1980s as a disease of domestic rabbits, but a new strain of the virus (RHDV-2) emerged in 2010, which also affects wild rabbit and hare species native to North America. Neither of these virus strains are known to infect humans, other pets, or livestock.

Why Should We Be Concerned?

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease is a reportable foreign animal disease in the United States. In March 2020, an outbreak of RHDV-2 was detected in domestic and wild rabbits in the southwestern U.S. and appears to be spreading. To date, RHDV-2 cases have been detected in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas as well as being reported in Mexico.

Two native rabbit species currently occur in Arkansas — the eastern cottontail and the swamp rabbit. These species are important parts of our native ecosystems and are popular with hunters and wildlife enthusiasts. Many Arkansans also keep domestic rabbits as pets, show animals, or livestock. If introduced to Arkansas, significant mortality events may occur in both domestic and wild rabbit populations.

Protecting Arkansas's Rabbits

The RHDV-2 virus has not been detected in Arkansas, yet. We are asking for everyone's help to prevent the introduction of this virus and protect our state's resources.

The RHDV-2 virus is very resistant to extreme temperatures and can survive in the environment for months under certain conditions. The virus spreads through direct contact between live rabbits or exposure to contaminated materials (carcasses, pelts, food, water, caging, etc.). Other animals also may spread this virus without becoming infected, including birds and rodents that may contaminate food or bedding and carnivores that may ingest infected rabbits. People can spread the virus indirectly by carrying it on their clothing and shoes.

Precautions Everyone Can Take:

- Please report any sick or dead wild rabbits found in Arkansas as soon as possible to the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission at agfc.health@agfc.ar.gov. Please include an estimate of the number of animals involved, the exact location of the event, and a description of what you observed. Pictures are very helpful. Do not pick up or handle sick animals or carcasses unless specifically instructed to do so. It is not necessary to report individual animals that have been hit by vehicles or experienced other obvious trauma.
- If you have traveled to an area where RHDV-2 is known to occur or have observed unexplained rabbit mortality while in an area, please clean and disinfect your clothing, footwear, and any gear (camping, hiking, biking equipment, etc.) before using them in another location. For instructions on disinfection and a map of known RHDV-2 affected areas, please visit www.agfc.com/riskid.

Precautions for Domestic Rabbit Owners:

- There is no vaccine for RHDV-2 licensed for use in the U.S. Special licenses have been issued for the importation of European vaccines to areas where outbreaks are occurring. Importation of these vaccines will be tightly regulated until a U.S.-licensed product becomes available.
- Do not allow pet, feral, or wild rabbits to have contact with your rabbits or gain entry to the facility or home.
- Do not allow visitors in rabbitries or let them handle pet rabbits without protective clothing (including coveralls, shoe covers, hair covering, and gloves).
- Always wash hands with warm soapy water before entering your rabbit area, after removing protective clothing and before leaving the rabbit area.
- Do not introduce new rabbits from unknown or untrusted sources. Do not add rabbits to your rabbitry from animal shelters or other rescue operations.
- If you bring outside rabbits onto your premises, keep them in a separate location/building from your existing rabbits. Use separate equipment for newly acquired or sick rabbits to avoid spreading disease. Always care for new rabbits after visiting other enclosures and wear separate shoes, headwear and clothing. Wash hands and arms between groups.
- Sanitize all equipment and cages moved on or off premises before they are returned to the rabbitry. Disinfect with 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide mixed with water.
- Consult a veterinarian to review and enhance biosecurity practices.
- The primary clinical signs associated with RHDV-2 include sudden death, often involving multiple animals, and occasionally blood around the nose or mouth. Some animals may develop fever, jaundice, loss of appetite, act lethargic or show respiratory or nervous issues. If you see any of these signs, contact your veterinarian or the Arkansas Agriculture Department Livestock and Poultry Division at 501-225-1598 immediately.

