

Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD)

Overview

- RHD is also known as VHD, RVHD or 'Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease'.
- RHD is caused by a virus, it causes severe symptoms and often death.
- It's common in wild rabbits and spreads easily to pet rabbits.
- RHD spreads through the air, by insect bites or by contact with an infected rabbit.
- There are two types of RHD
 - **RHD1** – causes very sudden disease and is fatal nearly all of the time.
 - **RHD2** – takes slightly longer to develop (5-10 days) and is fatal in 50% of cases.
- **Vaccinate your rabbits against both RHD1 and RHD2 to protect them fully from this serious disease.**



What is RHD?

RHD is a virus that attacks the internal organs (especially the liver). It causes massive internal bleeding which nearly always causes death. There are two types of RHD virus; RHD1 and RHD2.

A rabbit with RHD1 is likely to die within 2 days of catching the disease. Rabbits with RHD2 develop symptoms a little more slowly and often die within 1-2 weeks. Rabbits with are much more likely to spread the disease because they live for longer with symptoms.

Symptoms

Symptoms can include:

- Blood around the nose, mouth or bottom
- Low energy (lethargy)
- Eating less
- High temperature
- Sudden death

RHD often develops so quickly that infected rabbits die before their owner notices any symptoms.

Treatment and outlook

Sadly, there is no cure for either RHD1 or RHD2 and the chances of survival are slim. If symptoms are severe, euthanasia is often the kindest option.

If your rabbit has caught RHD2 they have a 50% chance of surviving with intensive care from your vet. However, recovery

can take weeks to months and symptoms are often so severe that euthanasia (putting to sleep) becomes the kindest option.

After infection

If one of your rabbits has died from RHD, their enclosure and all other items should be thrown away. RHD can survive in the environment (on bowls, water bottles, walls, grass etc) for months, so you must seek advice from your vet about how to properly disinfect. Only fully vaccinated rabbits should be allowed into their area in the future.

If you own a rabbit that has survived RHD you must vaccinate any new rabbits and wait at least three weeks before introducing them to each other.

Preventing RHD



Vaccination

- Fortunately, we can vaccinate our rabbits against RHD1 and RHD2 (as well as myxomatosis) – read more about rabbit vaccinations on our website.

Prevent insect bites

- Keep your rabbits and their living environment clean to avoid attracting insects.

- Insect proof or hang insect repellent strips around your rabbits' living space.
- Speak to your vet for advice on the best flea protection for your rabbits.
- Fleas from cats and fleas from dogs can spread RHD; make sure all your animals are regularly treated for fleas.

Prevent contact with wild rabbits

- Keep your pet rabbits away from wild rabbits by rabbit proofing your garden or double fencing their living space.

Quarantine new rabbits

- Any new rabbits should be vaccinated and kept away from your existing rabbits for at least three weeks.

When to contact your vet

Book an urgent appointment with your vet if your rabbit has any of the symptoms listed above.

You know your rabbit best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

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