

# WHAT IS RABBIT HEAMORRAGIC DISEASE?

- RHD is caused by a highly contagious and fatal calcivirus in the genus lagovirus (rabbit heamorrhagic disease virus or RHDV).
- It effects domestic rabbits, wild rabbits & hares.



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# WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RHD?

Symptoms of RHD in domesticated rabbits include, but are not limited to:

Loss of appetite

Lethargy

Fever of 40°C or higher

Seizures, weakness, wobbliness and other neurological issues

Jaundice, or yellowing of the skin and mucosal membranes (most noticeably in the ears)

Bleeding from nose, mouth, genitals or rectum

Difficulty breathing

Sudden death



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## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RHD?

RHD kills quickly, giving little warning.

Rabbits often die without showing any symptoms.

Any sudden death, especially in an otherwise healthy rabbit, is

suspicious and should be reported to your veterinarian as a possible case of RHD.



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## WHAT IS THE INCUBATION PERIOD AFTER EXPOSURE?

- RHDV2 has a recorded incubation period of 3-5 days.
- Previous experiments infecting laboratory rabbits with RHDV2 showed an incubation of 3-9 days until onset of symptoms.
- Death occurred 3-5 days after symptoms appeared.



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## CAN RABBITS SURVIVE RHD?

- Death Rate (Mortality): RHDV2 kills as few as 5% and up to and exceeding 80% depending on natural resistance.
- In the 2020 Southwest US and Mexico outbreak, a death rate of about 90% was reported.
- This has been attributed to the population's lack of previous exposure to RHDV2 and is the current scenario that we've been experiencing here in South Africa.



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## CAN RABBITS SURVIVE RHD?

- Rabbits who survive RHDV are carriers and shed the virus for at least 42 days, perhaps longer.
- Asymptomatic Carriers: Some rabbits display little or no sign of RHD. This is referred to as asymptomatic infection. These rabbits may “shed” the virus for up to 2 months meaning that rabbits that appear healthy may infect other rabbits because their bodies are producing the live virus.



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## HOW DOES RHD SPREAD?

- The virus is shed by infected animals through urine, faeces, blood, milk, saliva and mucus.
- Insects carry the virus on their bodies or through meals of infected blood.
- It can also easily be transmitted on shoes or clothing and “vectors” like insects, indoor/outdoor pets and car tyres that become contaminated with the live virus.



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## HOW LONG CAN THE VIRUS SURVIVE?

- It remains viable in the environment outside a host for a considerable length of time!
- The tissues of animals that die from RHD are particularly potent as sources of virus.
- RHDV2 remains viable for 3.5 months at room temperature at 20°C on fabric.
- The virus that causes RHD persists for 7.5 months at near freezing temperatures
- RHDV2 can survive temperatures of up to 50°C for one hour.
- The virus can also withstand cycles of freezing and thawing.



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## TREATMENT & PREVENTION

- RHD treatment is supportive and palliative care in isolation.
- There are currently no known antiviral drugs or other treatments available that can prevent death from RHD.
- There are currently no vaccines available in South Africa.
- Biosecurity is the best option for protecting your rabbit.



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