



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

COMMISSIONER WILTON SIMPSON

Rabbit Clubs, Fairs, Exhibitions and Shows

The recent finding of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV-2) in multiple states, including Florida, demonstrates the importance of management practices which decrease the risk of disease introduction or spread. Click [here](#) for more information of RHDV. Increased biosecurity practices are always recommended, not just for RHD, but other common contagious conditions such as Pasteurella and mites. RHD is caused by a calicivirus and is extremely contagious between rabbits. Following strict biosecurity guidelines can help reduce risk of exposure and transmission of RHD.

Outdoor rabbits are at the highest risk for diseases like RHD. Indoor rabbits cared for with excellent biosecurity practices are at low risk of RHD and other diseases. However, even indoor rabbits that attend live rabbit events are at higher risk of contracting diseases including RHD. Rabbit owners should continue to take prudent biosecurity measures, including not purchasing hay or other commodities originating in RHDV-2 affected states.

If you plan to attend an event with your rabbit, please see below recommendations to reduce your animal's chances of becoming ill:

- **Showing**
 - Judges and veterinarians should change gloves or wash hands between animals.
 - Do not share show carpets; designate one per animal.
 - Be sure the show has excellent vector control. Flies, rats, cats, dogs, birds, etc. can move infectious agents, such as viruses and parasites around on their feet and body.
 - Avoid common grooming stations.
- **Traveling**
 - Check with the state of destination for any requirements.
 - Some states may require an Official Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (OCVI/health certificate) or have additional restrictions for rabbits coming from states with RHD.
- **Animal health**
 - Monitor rabbits closely for signs of illness (poor appetite, looking limp/depressed, behavioral changes, etc.) and seek immediate veterinary care.
 - Isolate sick rabbits in a separate, designated isolation area.
 - If you add rabbits from other locations, isolate these rabbits for 2 weeks before introducing to the home population of rabbits.
- **Housing**
 - Keep show rabbits in cages off the ground.
 - Do not allow nose-to-nose contact between rabbits at an exhibition.
 - Clean and disinfect cages, waterers, and feed bowls daily.
 - Do not allow rabbits to exercise in common areas on exhibition grounds.
 - Do not use materials gathered from outside for bedding or cage base.
- **Human best practices**

- Wash hands frequently, especially before and after handling individual animals and between groups.
- Wear different clothes and shoes at shows than at home.
- After returning from an exhibition, change clothing and footwear and wash hands before contacting main colony.
- Wash show clothing and clean and disinfect footwear immediately after returning home.
- Do not share equipment, grooming tools, feeding implements, etc.
- Don't handle others' rabbits.
- Use separate footwear for outside and inside the rabbitry, or use a disinfectant footbath, to avoid tracking contamination on your shoes
- **Clean and disinfect equipment = (See [USDA C&D guidance](#))**
 - Cleaning
 - Remove all visible organic debris from items to be disinfected (cages, feeding equipment, waterers, footwear, etc.). Items made of wood are best discarded or burned.
 - Wash items thoroughly with soap and water; rinse well and let dry.
 - Allow prolonged exposure to sunlight when possible.
 - Disinfection
 - [EPA List of Disinfectants for Use Against RHDV2](#)
 - Saturate by submersion or spray with 10% household bleach (sodium hypochlorite) or 1% Virkon®S (DuPont).
 - Allow 10 minutes contact, then rinse and let dry before allowing animal contact.
- **Feeding**
 - Obtain hay from areas not affected with RHD.
 - Keep feed covered or in a container with a lid while at shows.
 - Do not share feed, water, or treats with other exhibitors.
 - Do not feed plants or forage gathered from outside to your rabbit
- **At home**
 - Clean and disinfect cages, equipment, and transportation surfaces after shows.
 - Isolate all rabbits returning from an event for 30 days before returning them to the main colony.
 - Ensure wild rabbits do not come near your rabbit(s).
 - Maintain proper fencing so wild rabbits cannot enter your yard, rabbit housing, or feed storage area.
 - Do not allow other people who own rabbits to handle your rabbit(s).
 - Watch that dogs, cats, birds and scavengers do not bring rabbit carcasses onto your property; promptly dispose of and disinfect.
 - Do not allow rabbits to share toys and enrichment objects.
 - Feed, handle, and care for young rabbits first, then healthy adult animals, then quarantined rabbits, then sick rabbits.

Show, fair and club organizers should consider:

- Shortening the OCVI for exhibition requirement as listed in [5C-4](#) to within 72 hours of the show.
- Cancelling the show if the organizers feel increase biosecurity practices cannot be maintained or implemented.
- Setting additional requirements for protecting exhibitors and their rabbits.
- Risk of disease transmission could be reduced at club meetings by only having rabbits from one premises present per meeting.
- All club members should wash hands before and after handling rabbits and arrive at the meeting site with clean clothing and clean/disinfected footwear.

- After returning home, organizers and exhibitors should change clothes and footwear and wash their hands before caring for their own rabbits.

As a reminder, please report any unusual illnesses or death to your veterinarian or the Florida State Veterinarian's Office, (850) 410-0900 or RAD@FDACS.gov.