



LEVIN & HOROWHENUA

VETS...your animal health professionals

- by insects (flies, fleas and mosquitoes) which come into contact with an infected rabbit then land on your rabbit
- from clothing, bedding, footwear or bowls that have been in contact with an infected rabbit
- the virus can also spread short distances in the wind

Infected rabbits shed the virus through urine, faeces and respiratory secretions (e.g. when sneezing)

Carriers of the virus often remain infectious for around a month depending on climate conditions; however, the virus has been known to persist for as long as 215 days.

Even though the virus cannot reproduce in other mammals, predators and scavengers including some birds can excrete the virus through their faeces after ingesting an infected rabbit carcass.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS MY RABBIT HAS THE DISEASE?

The incubation period is only a few days. RHVD is often a very swift and sudden killer, giving little warning. Rabbits may die suddenly without showing any symptoms at all. They may be found with bleeding from the nose, mouth or rectum.

A small percentage of rabbits may get a less severe form. Symptoms may include:

- Depression
- Loss of Appetite
- Uneasiness or lethargy
- Excitement
- Loss of appetite
- Swollen eyelids
- Paralysis
- Bleeding from the eyes
- Paddling and spasms
- Vocalising/squealing

Rabbits that initially recover from these symptoms often later develop jaundice, weight-loss and lethargy,

RHVD

WHAT IS RABBIT HAEMORRHAGIC VIRAL DISEASE?

RHVD (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Viral Disease), also known as Rabbit Calicivirus Disease (RCD), is a highly infectious and usually fatal disease that affects wild and domestic rabbits of European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), which includes all wild and domestic rabbits in New Zealand.

The virus was first introduced to New Zealand in 1997 to control the wild rabbit population on farms. This strain of the virus was RHVD 1. In 2018 a second strain of the virus, RHVD1K5 was released in New Zealand. Only a few months later a third strain of the virus, RHVD2 was found to have been accidentally introduced as well.



HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

Rabbits can contract RHVD in a number of ways:

- from direct contact with another rabbit who is carrying the disease
- from hay, grass or fruit and vegetables that have been contaminated by infected rabbits while growing in the fields

diarrhoea or constipation and abdominal pain due to liver and lung damage caused by the virus. They often die a few weeks after infection.

Rabbits who survive this disease are carriers and shed the virus.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY RABBIT?

This disease can be prevented through vaccination. Prior to the introduction of the two new RHVD strains in 2018, rabbits were vaccinated with a vaccine called Cylap RCD. Cylap does not give protection for all of the strains currently in New Zealand so we have switched to a vaccination called Filavac VHD. Filavac provides good protection against all strains of the virus present in New Zealand.

Rabbits in good health should be vaccinated annually from 10 weeks of age. If the chance of exposure is high, rabbits can be vaccinated before this, however they will require a booster 4 to 6 weeks' later. Rabbits that are up to date for Cylap vaccination will not be protected against RHVD2 and will need to start a Filavac vaccination programme immediately.

Vaccination is the best chance of protection for exposed rabbits.

However, no vaccine is completely effective under all circumstances. There are also several other diseases that cannot be vaccinated against that exhibit similar signs. If at any time you think your rabbit may be unwell please contact the clinic immediately as sick rabbits tend to deteriorate quickly without treatment.



OTHER MEASURES TO PROTECT YOUR RABBIT INCLUDE:

- House your rabbits indoors or if outdoors place the cage in a fenced area so wild rabbits cannot approach the cage area
- Wash your hands thoroughly before handling your rabbits, particularly when you come home from places where other rabbits may have been, or where people who have been in contact with rabbits may have been. This would include places such as feed stores, pet stores, country show grounds, etc.
- Change your clothes and wash your hands after handling or coming in contact with rabbits. Wash these clothes twice in hot water before you wear them around your rabbit.
- If possible know your sources of hay and feed and if they are near areas of any outbreaks.
- Quarantine any new rabbit for 10 days. Always handle quarantined rabbits last, and keep all supplies for them separate from your other rabbit's supplies.
- Disinfect objects, using a viricidal disinfectant such as Sterigene, or Virkon. Remembering that it must stay in contact with the item and remain wet for at least ten minutes before rinsing off. Ensure correct dilutions are used.
- Keep your rabbit's cage and run clean to reduce flies and other insects

Vaccination offers the best chance of protection for exposed rabbits