

What is RHDV2, and how can I protect my rabbit?

What is RHDV2?

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) is a lethal virus that affects rabbits but no other species. RHD has been present in Europe and Australia since the 1970s, but began to emerge in the US several years ago. There are two variants of the RHD virus; the variant that is found here is called RHDV2. RHDV2 affects both wild and domestic rabbits and approximately 75% of RHDV2 cases are lethal. When RHDV2 first emerged in the US cases were primarily found in the West and Southwest, but over the last few years outbreaks have been reported in most other parts of the country. Although there are no documented cases of RHDV2 in Maine at this time, outbreaks have been confirmed in locations as close as New York, Connecticut, and Quebec.

How can I protect my rabbit?

The best protection against RHDV2 is vaccination. Although RHDV2 vaccines have been available in Europe for many years, it is only very recently that a vaccine (made by a company called Medgene) has been approved for use in the state of Maine. The Medgene vaccine is under the FDA's EUA (Emergency Use Authorization). This means that the vaccine is considered safe but that efficacy studies are still ongoing. The Medgene vaccine is expected to be granted full authorization once those studies are complete. The Medgene vaccine is safe to give to rabbits 7 weeks of age and older and is initially given as a two-vaccine series, with the second vaccination taking place 21 days after the first. The Medgene vaccine is believed to be effective for one year, after which a single booster vaccine can be administered annually for ongoing protection. To make it easier to monitor the spread of RHDV2 around the country, microchipping of vaccinated rabbits is recommended but not required.

What else can I do to protect my rabbit?

The second best protection is to stay informed! Bookmark this site (<https://rhdv2.org/where-is-rhdv2/>) and check it periodically to see if any outbreaks have been reported in Maine or New Hampshire. Needless to say we will also inform our clients if we receive credible reports of outbreaks in our area.

If cases of RHDV2 are detected in Maine or New Hampshire, additional environmental precautions would be recommend, for example:

- Reducing or eliminating outdoor playtime, especially if you know that wild rabbits or hares may be living on your property.
- Minimizing your rabbit's exposure to mosquitoes and flies.
- Changing clothes and washing hands after interacting with rabbits outside your household.
- Preventing your vaccinated rabbit from being exposed to unvaccinated rabbits (for example during playdates or new rabbit introductions).
- Because the virus can be transmitted via contaminated food sources, be sure that you are EITHER purchasing hay that is harvested in an area where RHDV2 has not been found, OR purchasing prepackaged hay from a company that has adopted appropriate quarantine protocols to insure the hay that they sell is safe. For more information about what Oxbow (who makes the hay that we sell at SMHSM) is doing to protect their customers' rabbits from RHDV2, please see <https://oxbowanimalhealth.com/blog/rhdv2-what-oxbow-is-doing-to-keep-your-pets-safe/>.

- Wash greens thoroughly before feeding, and avoid feeding fresh greens foraged in areas where RHDV2 has been found.
- Consider skipping the rabbit house at the fair! As fun as it is to see all of the adorable and unusual rabbit breeds on display, it is best to avoid being exposed to that many rabbits from that many different areas (some of which may already be experiencing RHDV2 outbreaks).
- For more information about protecting your rabbit, visit <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease>.

I'd like to get my rabbit vaccinated. What next?

We will be offering vaccine clinics here at our hospital on Thursday, February 29th from 1:30 to 4:30 pm, and on Thursday, March 21st from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm. More clinics will be added if needed to meet demand. Vaccine clinic pricing will be as follows:

(for rabbits who have received exams at our hospital in the last three months)

1. 2-vaccine series only: \$100
2. 2-vaccine series + microchipping: \$140

(for rabbits who have not received exams at our hospital within the last three months)

3. exam + 2-vaccine series: \$140
4. exam + 2-vaccine series + microchipping: \$180

If your rabbit has already received an RHDV2 vaccine at another hospital, please email staff@mainesmallmammals.com for information on pricing.

A few other things to keep in mind about vaccination:

- Clients will be asked to pay the full amount at the time they are scheduling their appointments.
- **Refunds will only be available in situations in which the rabbit is found to be too ill for safe vaccination.** Please note that if you come in for the first appointment but not the second, you will need to restart the vaccine series (and pay the full amount again) for your rabbit to be protected.
- The safety of this vaccine for pregnant or lactating does is unknown. If you have an intact female rabbit and are concerned she may be pregnant, please contact us at staff@mainesmallmammals.com prior to scheduling your vaccine appointments.
- For safety reasons, all rabbits must travel to the hospital securely housed in a carrier or cage. Please do not carry your rabbit inside or use an open container like a box or laundry basket.
- If you have a senior rabbit (8+ years for most breeds, 6+ years for giant breeds) or a rabbit with serious health issues, please contact us at staff@mainesmallmammals.com. Dr. Ford will review your rabbit's health history and make a recommendation about the safety of vaccinations.
- Clients will be asked to remain in the hospital for 15 minutes after vaccination to monitor patients for adverse reactions.
- Please note: vaccine appointments (including those with exams) are for the purpose of vaccination ONLY. Please do not schedule a vaccine appointment if there are unrelated issues you would like to discuss with the doctor.
- SHELTERS, RESCUES, BREEDERS AND CLIENTS WITH 5 OR MORE RABBITS: Please contact us at staff@mainesmallmammals.com to make special arrangements rather than signing up for a clinic.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SCHEDULE YOUR VACCINE APPOINTMENTS, PLEASE CALL 207-535-9330 OR EMAIL STAFF@MAINESMALLMAMMALS.COM.