

8 February 2017

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus 1 K5 release

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV) 1 K5 will be released nationally in the first week of March 2017. This virus is being released as a biocontrol measure to manage wild European rabbits. RHDV1 K5 is not a new virus; it is a Korean variant of the existing virus already widespread in Australia that was released in 1996. RHDV1s infect European rabbits and are not known to cause disease in any other Australian animal species.

Protection of domestic rabbits

To help to prevent domestic rabbits from becoming infected with RHDV1 K5 it is recommended that:

1. All healthy domestic rabbits are vaccinated against RHDV1- consult your private veterinarian regarding vaccination of your rabbits.
2. Direct and indirect contact between domestic wild rabbits is prevented- examples of indirect contact include cutting grass that has had wild rabbits on it and feeding the grass to domestic rabbits or placing hutches in areas that wild rabbits have access to.
3. Good insect control is also important and will help reduce the risks of introduction of both RHDV and myxomatosis. Insect control could include insect proofing the hutch or keeping the rabbits indoors.
4. Wash hands, with warm soapy water between handling rabbits.

How is the virus spread?

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease viruses can spread easily by contact between infected rabbits through bodily fluids and on infected material or objects including hay, food, clothing, shoes, people, cages, equipment, dust, insects, wild birds and rodents. The virus survives in the environment from days to months, depending on the weather conditions.

Clinical signs of RHDV1 K5 infection

Contact your private veterinarian if you have any concerns regarding your rabbit's health. Most infected rabbits become quiet and will die suddenly, with no external signs. Unfortunately, there are no effective treatments for rabbit haemorrhagic disease.

What to do if you have RHDV1 K5 on your property

Infected rabbits should be isolated and their bodies should be disposed of in a manner that will minimise environmental contamination. Examples include municipal waste disposal, deep burial and incineration.

If you have RHDV1 K5 on your property, all housing, bedding, feed and equipment that may have been contaminated should be disposed of or thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Disinfectants that can be used to decontaminate any equipment include 10 % bleach. Follow manufacturer's instructions when using disinfectants.

As this virus can survive in the environment for months, it is important to rest areas that any infected rabbits have had access to. Discuss with your private veterinarian the details of this resting period.

How will the virus be released?

There are 226 community release sites in NSW and three intensive management sites near Orange, Gundagai and Hay. The virus will be released on carrot baits. Bait delivery of RHDV1 K5 is considered more humane than the inoculation method as rabbits do not need to be caught. The timing of the release is deliberate to minimize exposure of young rabbits to the virus.

Further information

For all rabbit health concerns contact your private veterinarian.

For information on rabbit biosecurity contact Kate Wingett, Veterinary Officer, NSW DPI, on (02) 6391 3717 or kate.wingett@dpi.nsw.gov.au

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (8 February 2017). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.