**Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease:**

**Guidance for Hunting and Outdoor Recreation**

**What is Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease?**

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is a highly contagious, often fatal disease caused by a group of caliciviruses affecting domestic and wild rabbits. Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV) has been recognized since the 1980s as a disease of domestic rabbits.  However, a new strain of the virus (RHDV-2) emerged in 2010 which did not affect native North American wild rabbit and hare species until the recent outbreak in the southwestern U.S.. Neither of these virus strains are known to infect humans, other pets, or livestock.

The RHDV-2 virus is resistant to extreme temperatures and can survive in the environment for months under certain conditions. The virus spreads through direct contact between infected and susceptible live rabbits or exposure to contaminated materials (carcasses, pelts, food, water, forage, etc.). Birds, rodents, flies, predators, and scavengers can spread this virus via their feet, fur/feathers, or feces without becoming infected themselves. People can spread the virus indirectly by carrying it on their clothing, hands, and shoes.

**General Precautions:**

* Report sick or dead wild rabbits to your state wildlife agency immediately.
* If traveling to an area where RHDV-2 is present, clean and disinfect clothing, footwear, and gear (camping, hiking, biking equipment, etc.) before leaving the area.
* Disinfect or dispose of cages, boxes, or other materials that came into contact with wild rabbits transported to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator.

**Precautions for Hunters and Falconers:**

* If sick or dead rabbits are observed in an area, do not hunt, run dogs, or fly falconry birds in that area. Contact the state wildlife agency immediately.
* Avoid hunting in areas where RHDV-2 outbreaks have been recently documented. Contact the state wildlife agency for information on where RHDV-2 has been identified.
* After handling wild rabbits, wash hands and change clothing and footwear before handling or caring for domestic rabbits.
* Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling animals.
* Wear rubber, nitrile, or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game. Wash hands thoroughly with warm water and soap or sanitizer after handling game. Disinfect all knives, equipment, and surfaces that were in contact with game.
* Thoroughly cook all game to an internal temperature of 165°F.
* Do not feed game meat from wildlife that appear sick, are found dead, or test positive for a contagious disease to people or pets, including falconry birds.
* Avoid transporting live wild rabbits for release into training pens or for field trials, especially if sick or dead rabbits have been observed in the area.

**Carcass Handling**

If you find a dead wild rabbit:

* Wear disposable gloves when handling rabbit carcasses.
* Double bag carcasses and spray outside of bag with disinfectant (see below).
* Wash hands with soap and warm water after handling carcasses and removing gloves. Dispose of gloves in trash headed to landfill.
* Contact the state veterinarian if the carcass is a domestic rabbit or the state wildlife agency if the carcass is a wild rabbit to determine if testing should be done. A list of appropriate wildlife agencies by state can be found here: <https://www.fws.gov/offices/statelinks.html>.
* If testing is recommended, refrigerate double-bagged carcass or pack in ice before shipping. If needed and possible, store carcasses in a secure, dedicated container (cooler, freezer) away from food intended for human consumption.
* Follow shipping or submission guidance from your state veterinarian or state wildlife agency.

**Practical Disinfection**

* A diluted solution of sodium hypochlorite (household bleach) is an effective disinfectant on surfaces that have been thoroughly cleaned with soap and water and rinsed.
* To prepare the correct dilution add ½ cup of 6% or 8.25% bleach concentrate to one gallon of water. See <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv-cleaning-guidance.pdf> for more disinfection information.
* Wear nitrile, silicon, or rubber gloves, protective clothing, and eye protection when mixing and handling bleach or bleach solution; work in a well-ventilated area.
* Contact time for proper disinfection is 5 minutes. Rinse surfaces with fresh water following treatment with bleach solution.

**Disposal Options**

Disposal options may vary based on jurisdiction. If testing is not required, the carcass should be disposed of in compliance with your county regulations and local department of health.