

RHD2 (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Variant Two)

Understanding RHD2: Protecting Your Rabbit from Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Variant Two

RHD2, or Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Variant 2, is a dangerous virus that affects many rabbits in the UK. Without proper vaccination, RHD2 is often fatal, so protecting your rabbit with the right vaccines is crucial.



What Is RHD2?

Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD), also known as Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD), is a highly contagious virus. There are two strains:

- **RHD1**
- **RHD2**

RHD2 is the more recent strain, posing a higher risk to pet rabbits in the UK due to its ease of transmission. It progresses slowly and causes internal bleeding, often with very few symptoms, making it hard to detect until it's too late.

Symptoms of RHD2

RHD2 can be difficult to spot since many rabbits show no signs before succumbing to the virus. However, the few symptoms that may appear include:

- Fever
- Lethargy or reluctance to move
- Loss of appetite
- Blood around the nostrils or mouth

If you notice any of these signs in your rabbit, it's essential to contact your vet immediately.

How Does RHD2 Spread?



RHD2 is highly contagious and can spread rapidly due to its long incubation period of about nine days. This means your rabbit could be infected and spreading the virus before symptoms appear. RHD2 can be transmitted in several ways:

- Direct contact between rabbits
- Contaminated hay, bedding, or the rabbit's environment
- On your clothes, shoes, or hands
- Through the wind
- By insects, birds, or wild rabbits

If one rabbit in your household contracts RHD2, it's almost impossible to prevent it from spreading to other unvaccinated rabbits. If one of your rabbits passes away suddenly, especially if they were unvaccinated, it's important to have your other rabbits checked by a vet.

Preventing RHD2 Spread

If your rabbit does contract RHD2, you'll need to thoroughly disinfect their living area to prevent further transmission. RHD2 can survive for a long time in the environment, so take careful steps to sanitise everything before introducing new rabbits.

Important Tip: Be cautious when buying second-hand rabbit equipment. Always check whether the previous rabbits were vaccinated to avoid potential transmission.



Prognosis for a Rabbit with RHD2

Unfortunately, if your rabbit isn't vaccinated, their chance of surviving RHD2 is very low. There is no cure for the virus, and sudden death is often the first and only sign. Without post-mortem testing, you may never know your rabbit had RHD2.

In some cases, if your unvaccinated rabbit falls ill, your vet may recommend euthanasia to prevent further suffering.

Vaccinating Against RHD2



Vaccination is the most effective way to protect your rabbit from RHD2. Whether your rabbit lives indoors or outdoors, they should be vaccinated with a combination booster that guards against RHD1, RHD2, and myxomatosis. Typically, this vaccine is administered once a year, but consult your vet for personalised advice.

If you've recently lost a rabbit to RHD2 and are considering getting a new one, ensure they are vaccinated before bringing them home.

Additional Steps to Protect Your Rabbit

In addition to vaccination, there are several other ways to protect your rabbit from RHD2:

- **Prevent flies:** Since RHD2 can be transmitted through insect bites, use fly nets around your rabbit's hutch or enclosure to keep flies out.
- **Flea protection:** Fleas can carry RHD2, so it's essential to protect your rabbit with a suitable flea treatment. Talk to your vet about the right product, and make sure other pets, like cats or dogs, are also flea-free.
- **Keep the hutch clean:** Regular cleaning of your rabbit's living space can help deter flies and reduce the risk of infection.
- **Rabbit-proof your garden:** Prevent wild rabbits from entering your garden, as they could carry the virus.
- **Isolate new rabbits:** If you're bringing a new rabbit into your home, keep them separate from other rabbits for at least three weeks to avoid potential transmission.

