



# Oregon

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Dear Oregon Falconers:

A rabbit from a Portland area neighborhood was recently collected and tested for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus-2 (RHDV-2) by the USDA Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. This animal tested positive for RHDV-2 and efforts are now underway by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and USDA to determine the source and extent of this disease outbreak.

RHDV-2 is a highly pathogenic and contagious calicivirus affecting all rabbits, domestic or wild, and closely related species; it does not infect other animals or people and is not related to the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. First identified in domestic rabbits in Europe, RHDV-2 can infect native North American rabbit and hare species. Outbreaks in wild rabbits and several domestic have occurred in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Florida, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming since early March 2020. This disease has caused extensive mortalities in wild cottontail and jackrabbit populations in affected areas.

RHDV-2 is persistent in the environment and can remain infectious on the surfaces of objects, on clothing, and in tissues for a significant amount of time. It may be spread between rabbits by inhalation, contact with contaminated equipment, contact with flies and other insects, contact with urine or feces from infected rabbits, and contact with feces from predators that have eaten infected rabbits. There is no specific treatment and the disease is often fatal in rabbits (potentially 75% to ~100%). Rabbits that don't die immediately may have a poor appetite, inactivity, fever, and a bloody nose.

**Oregon falconers should avoid flying birds in areas with known RHDV2 outbreaks, prevent their birds from consuming dead or diseased rabbits, and take precautions to sanitize gear between outings.**

Raptors may be able to move RHDV2 after coming into contact with infected rabbit carcasses or parts.

#### **General Precautions:**

- Report sick or dead wild rabbits to your local ODFW biologist 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 materials that came into contact with wild rabbits or carcass parts.

#### **Precautions for Falconers:**

- If sick or dead rabbits are observed in an area, do not hunt, run dogs, or fly falconry birds in that area. Contact your local ODFW biologist immediately. ODFW veterinary staff can be reached at 866-968-2600.
- Avoid hunting falconry birds in areas where RHDV-2 outbreaks have been recently documented. Contact ODFW 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.

### **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 ODA state veterinarian at 1-800-347-7028 if the carcass is a domestic rabbit or the ODFW local biologist if the carcass is a wild rabbit to determine if testing should be done. You may also use the online report form (<https://oda.direct/rhd>) or email to [rhd@oda.state.or.us](mailto:rhd@oda.state.or.us).
- If testing is recommended, keep the rabbit carcass cool and double-bagged and store away from food intended for human consumption.

### **Disinfection and Disposal**

- 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](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.
- ODFW veterinary staff will provide directions for appropriate carcass disposal. Infected carcasses will be collected and incinerated.

Thank you for your assistance with this important disease response. Through your observations, Oregon wildlife falconers can help in surveillance for diseases that impact Oregon's wildlife. ODFW is working closely with the ODA State Veterinarian and USDA Wildlife Services to bring this Foreign Animal Disease outbreak under control. We will provide periodic updates as more information is available.



Colin Gillin  
State Wildlife Veterinarian