



Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) Statement

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Background

On March 2, 2018 it was initially reported that Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) had been identified in a feral rabbit population in the Nanaimo area. Since then RHD has also been confirmed in rabbits in Delta, Comox, Courtenay and Richmond. The Animal Health Centre in Abbotsford has had 34 submissions related to this disease outbreak as of April 16, 2018, 22 feral rabbits and 12 domestic rabbits (pet and commercial). Of the 22 feral rabbits submitted, 21 have tested positive and, so far, 2 of 7 tests completed on domestic rabbits have come back positive, with results pending on the 5 remaining cases. This disease does not affect humans and only affects rabbits, no other animals. It was first detected in China in 1984 and has been seen since in over 40 countries including the USA. It is also used for biological control of invasive rabbits in Australia and New Zealand.

The CFIA National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease Laboratory in Winnipeg has completed genetic sequencing testing on the initial isolate which confirmed the RHD virus strain as a virus variant referred to as HDV2. This was first seen in France in 2010. The strain in BC is most closely aligned with ^{as R}one reported in Spain in 2011. This is a different strain than has been identified previously in Manitoba in 2011 and Quebec in 2016 and is not like the strains used to control rabbits in New Zealand and Australia.

The strain in BC appears to be highly virulent and easily spread with a short incubation period. It also may infect rabbits less than 30 days of age unlike most other strains. Strict biosecurity is key for the prevention of spread to other rabbits. We encourage you to follow these links to a very thorough [Fact Sheet on RHD](#) and a document on [Rabbit Biosecurity Protocols](#). RHD is an "immediately notifiable disease", defined by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as "exotic to Canada for which there are no control or eradication programs." Please familiarize yourself with the full explanation on their [website](#).

The test for confirming RHD is available at the provincial veterinary diagnostic lab in Abbotsford ([Animal Health Centre](#)). Submission forms are available on the website. Testing for just RHD is being carried out without charge. If further testing or a complete necropsy was needed fees, as explained on the website, will apply.

Vaccines

There is no vaccine licensed for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease in Canada. The CFIA's Canadian Centre for Veterinary Biologics has kindly facilitated acquiring an emergency import permit

through the office of the Chief Veterinarian for BC, Jane Pritchard, which allows the vaccine to be re-distributed to clinics under the single application. The vaccine, Filavac, is a French vaccine with protection against RHDV2 and RHDV1. The vaccine is initially administered once to rabbits over 10 weeks of age and requires annual boosters to maintain immunity. It is available in blister packs of 10 individual doses and in a 50-dose vial that must be used within 2 hours of reconstitution. The first order of vaccines will be distributed tomorrow to those veterinarians who placed an order earlier this month. A new order for vaccine will be placed before the end of April and further orders will be carried out for as long as interest persists or until the end of the permit (June 26, 2018). If you are interested in ordering vaccine or would like more information on the vaccine, please e-mail jane.pritchard@gov.bc.ca.

Costs of vaccines are as follows (shipping and packaging not included):

1. Blister pack of 10 individual dose vials = 120 Euros = \$191.59 or \$20/dose. The single dose vaccine batch will have an expiry date of April 8, 2019.
2. Cardbox of one 50-dose multi-dose vial = 65 Euros = \$103.78 or \$2.10/dose. The 50-dose vial will expire September 28, 2018 or 2 hours after reconstitution.

For every dose administered by the veterinarian, the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) will require a vaccination certificate (a template for the certificate is provided by the CVO) that is signed by both the veterinarian administering the vaccine and the client (acknowledging that this is an unlicensed product); the signed certificate will need to be scanned/emailed or faxed back to the CVO.

For further information on how the investigation is proceeding, please contact the Wildlife Veterinarian with the FLNRO (Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations), Dr. Helen Schwantje at helen.schwantje@gov.bc.ca.

References

1. [Variant rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus in young rabbits, Spain](#). Dalton KP, Nicieza I, Balseiro A, Mugerza MA, Rosell JM, Casais R, Álvarez AL, Parra F.. Emerg Infect Dis. 2012 Dec;18(12):2009-12.
2. [The first reported case of rabbit hemorrhagic disease in Canada](#). Embury-Hyatt C, Postey R, Hisanaga T, Burton L, Hooper-McGrevy K, McIntyre L, Millar K, Pasick J. Can Vet J. 2012 Sep;53(9):998-1002.
3. <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/animals/terrestrial-animals/diseases/immediately-notifiable/rabbit-haemorrhagic-disease/eng/1472153866521/1472153917790>
CFIA Archived – 2016-10-19. Statement: Investigation into local outbreak of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease in Quebec