
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development

Rabbit owners warned about deadly rabbit virus

VICTORIA – Rabbit owners are being advised to take precautions with their pet rabbits in the wake of a highly infectious virus affecting feral rabbits in B.C. communities.

Recent testing carried out on dead feral rabbits in Nanaimo and Delta has confirmed the presence of rabbit haemorrhagic disease, caused by a calicivirus. Dead rabbits found in the Comox Valley are being shipped to the provincial lab for testing.

All dead rabbits have been feral European or domestic rabbits, so pet rabbits are at risk. Rabbit haemorrhagic disease is an extremely infectious and lethal disease of rabbits. It is the third confirmed diagnosis of this virus in Canada and the first in B.C. The disease is exclusive to rabbits. Humans and other animals, including dogs and cats, cannot be infected. The virus only affects European rabbits, and is not known to affect native North American rabbits.

Pet owners should monitor their rabbits daily for signs of illness, and contact their veterinarian immediately with any concerns. The virus causes hemorrhages by affecting the blood vessels, and attacks the liver and other organs. Most affected rabbits die suddenly, but can show signs of listlessness, lack of co-ordination, behaviour changes or trouble breathing before death. There is often bleeding from the nose at the time of death. Once infected, signs of illness occur quickly, usually within one to nine days.

While there is no threat to humans, and in addition to rabbit owners taking precautions, the public is advised not to move domestic rabbits into the wild at any time. As well, rabbit owners should take precautions when disposing of any rabbit remains. Rabbit owners who want more information about how to keep their pets safe can consult with their veterinarian, or review an SPCA fact sheet on rabbit hemorrhagic disease at: <http://spca.bc.ca/news/bc-spca-suspends-intake-of-rabbits-due-to-disease/>

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