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## INFORMATION BULLETIN

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

### **Rabbit virus found for second straight year**

PARKSVILLE – Rabbit owners in the mid-Island area are being advised to take precautions with their pet rabbits after the death of four feral rabbits in Parksville from a highly infectious virus.

Testing of the rabbits has confirmed the presence of rabbit hemorrhagic disease, caused by a calicivirus. It is the second year in a row that the virus has been found in mid-Island rabbits, but the source of the virus is unknown.

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is an extremely infectious and lethal disease that is exclusive to rabbits. Humans and other animals, including dogs and cats, cannot be infected. The strain of the virus seen last year 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, rabbit owners should avoid bringing the virus home by practising excellent hygiene when handling their animals and staying away from areas where the disease has occurred.

Rabbit owners who want more information about how to keep their pets safe can consult with their veterinarian regarding vaccinations and 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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