

RHDV2 Recommendations for Hunters and Trappers While Handling and Consuming Rabbits



Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV-2) is a highly contagious and often fatal calicivirus that affects rabbits and closely related species. Although the disease is currently found throughout the western U.S. in native cottontail and hare species, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is working under the assumption that the virus will eventually make its way to North Carolina. The following recommendations provide best management practices for handling and consuming rabbits:

- Treat rabbits as if they may be carrying the virus.
- Record the source and location of any sick or dead rabbits found while hunting or trapping. Be as detailed as possible including GPS coordinates if known. If RHDV-2 is found in NC, this information will be essential for controlling and preventing its spread.
- Prior to disposal, report mortalities that are not easily explained by other causes to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission by calling the Wildlife Helpline (866-318-2401). Place carcasses into a freezer in doubled freezer bags until Commission staff are able to retrieve them for testing.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces, equipment, and clothing that come in contact with rabbits, their urine or their feces. We recommend using a solution of 1 part household bleach to 10 parts water.
- When disposing of rabbit carcasses or their remains, either incinerate or bury them at least 3 feet deep to prevent scavenging. If field dressing rabbits, make sure to bury all remains on site.
- Rabbit Pens/Preserves: infected rabbits can shed the virus for more than 30 days after recovering from the disease. If trapping live rabbits for use in pens/preserves, hold all incoming rabbits in an isolated location away from other rabbits for at least 30 days before allowing them to come in contact with other rabbits. Make sure that quarantined rabbits, their urine and their feces cannot come in contact with other rabbits during the quarantine period.
- Do not import hay from western states, imported hay has been implicated in spreading the virus to new areas.
- General safety for food handling: fully cook rabbit meat and make sure the internal temperature reaches at least 160 F — use of a meat thermometer is recommended. Please see the [USDA webpage](#) for additional preparation guidance.