Ministry of Agriculture and Food

Disease Alert

Disease: Rabbit hemorrhagic disease

Species Affected: Wild rabbits

Location: Fort Nelson, BC

Date: September & October, 2026

Description: A die off-of wild rabbits (> 40 individuals) was detected in Fort Nelson, BC starting in late September 2026. Dead rabbits have been found along roadways and trails, as well as in residential areas. One of the dead rabbits, a snowshoe hare, was examined by a veterinary pathologist and diagnosed with rabbit hemorrhagic disease.

Disease information:

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD) is a sudden onset, highly contagious and fatal viral disease of rabbits and hares. Captive and feral European rabbits are most commonly affected, but native wild rabbits can also contract the disease. There is no known risk to human health.

Rabbits usually become sick within 1 to 5 days of being infected. Death is common after a short period of illness that can include fever, depression, loss of appetite, shortness of breath, neurological signs (e.g., difficulty walking, seizures, paralysis, etc.), and bleeding from the nose. Death may also occur suddenly without signs. There is no treatment for the disease.

RHD is spread between rabbits through saliva, nasal secretions, urine, and feces. It can also be spread by people who handle sick rabbits and by contaminated objects.

There was a large outbreak of RHD in 2018 primarily involving feral European rabbits in the Southwest corner of BC. Since then, cases have occurred sporadically in the province.

Recommendations:

- The best way to protect domestic rabbits from infection is through good biosecurity.
- Rabbit owners should report any suspicious deaths to their veterinarian and specimens can be submitted to the Animal Health Centre for diagnosis.
- In July 2022, the Canadian Centre for Veterinary Biologics (CCVB) licensed an RHD vaccine produced by the French company, Filavie. Filavie has designated Ceva

Animal Health as their Canadian distributor and enquiries may be directed to Ceva's customer service at service.canada@ceva.com.

Resources:

- Rabbit haemorrhagic disease