

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD): Show and Exhibition Guidance

Shows and exhibitions that bring rabbits together from various locations and farms can be a risk for the spread of disease between animals. Biosecurity practices are always important to help prevent disease transmission and protect animal health, not just for rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD), but more common contagious conditions such as Pasteurella, mites, etc. The highest risk areas are those with infected feral domestic or wild rabbits. Indoor rabbits cared for with excellent biosecurity practices are at very low risk of RHD and other diseases.

Rabbits co-mingled at club meeting, shows, etc. have greater risk of contracting respiratory disease (snuffles) from an infected rabbit compared to RHD. Risk of disease transmission could be reduced at club meetings by only having rabbits from one premises present per meeting. All club members must wash hands before and after handling rabbits and arrive at the meeting site with clean clothing and clean/disinfected footwear. After returning home, they should change clothes and footwear and wash their hands before caring for their own rabbits.

We all have different levels of risk we are willing to accept; the most conservative will not take animals away from home or allow them to contact other animals. Not every 4-H participant is required to show his/her animal if they do not want to for whatever reason.

Quarantined Premises or Premises under Emergency Rule Restrictions

- If a premises or geographic region is under quarantine, movement of rabbits, rabbit products, and equipment from quarantine areas to shows or other venues is prohibited.
- After a quarantine expires, show/fair management should establish policies for exhibitors from the previous quarantine and control areas who wish to attend their show.

Fair, Show, and Exhibition Requirements

- Consider postponing or cancelling shows in infected areas or states during an outbreak.
- It is up to each rabbit show's management to evaluate their risks and decide what disease control parameters they should establish and enforce. Veterinarians should be consulted to help with these decisions.
- American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) rabbit show, 4-H rabbit show, and fair managers can decide if they choose to add additional requirements for exhibitors and rabbits to attend an event (i.e., Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) vaccination).
- A veterinarian at each event should inspect all rabbits prior to entry or ensure a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (CVI) was issued prior to arrival.
- Check with the Office of the State Veterinarian [(907) 375-8215 or bob.gerlach@alaska.gov, sarah.coburn@alaska.gov] for guidance or risk-based recommendations.

Interstate Movement

- Each state has different interstate movement rules for rabbits.
- Some states require a CVI or have additional restrictions for states with outbreaks of RHD.
- Check with the state of destination for import and animal health requirements before travel.

What are specific biosecurity recommendations for events?

In addition to details included in the biosecurity guidance document, additional considerations should be included for exhibition animals:

- Showing
 - Judges and veterinarians should change gloves or wash hands between animals.
 - Do not share show carpets; designate one per animal.
 - Be sure the show has excellent vector control. Flies, rats, cats, dogs, birds, etc. can move viruses around on their feet and body.
 - Avoid common grooming stations.
- Animal health
 - Monitor rabbits closely for signs of illness (poor appetite, looking limp/depressed, behavioral changes, etc.) and report this to the show or exhibit manager/supervisor then seek immediate veterinary care.
 - Isolate sick rabbits in a designated isolation area.
- Housing
 - Keep show rabbits in cages off the ground.
 - Do not allow nose-to-nose contact between rabbits at an exhibition.
 - Clean and disinfect cages, waterers, and feed bowls daily.
 - Do not allow rabbits to exercise in common areas on exhibition grounds.
- Human best practices
 - Wash hands frequently, especially before and after handling animals.
 - Wear different clothes and shoes at shows than at home
 - After returning from an exhibition, change clothing and footwear and wash hands before contacting main colony.
 - Wash show clothing, clean and disinfect footwear ASAP after returning home.
 - Do not share equipment, grooming tools, feeding implements, etc.
 - Wash hands before and after handling or caring for rabbits and between groups.
 - Don't handle others' rabbits.
- Clean and disinfect equipment =(See [USDA C&D guidance](#))
 - Cleaning
 - Remove all visible organic debris from items to be disinfected (cages, feeding equipment, waterers, footwear, etc.). Items made of wood are best discarded or burned.
 - Wash items thoroughly with soap and water; rinse well and let dry.
 - Allow prolonged exposure to sunlight when possible.
 - Disinfection
 - Saturate by submersion or spray with 10% household bleach (sodium hypochlorite) or 1% Virkon®S (DuPont).
 - Allow 10 minutes contact, then rinse and let dry before allowing animal contact.
- Feeding
 - Obtain hay from unaffected areas.
 - Keep feed covered or in a container with a lid while at shows.
 - Do not share feed, water, or treats with other exhibitors.
- Going home
 - Clean and disinfect cages, equipment, and transportation surfaces after shows.
 - Isolate all rabbits returning from an event for 30 days before returning them to the main colony.
 - Feed, handle, and care for young rabbits first, then healthy adult animals, then quarantined rabbits, then sick rabbits.
 - Report unusual morbidity (illness) or mortality (death) to the Office of the State Veterinarian [(907) 375-8215 or bob.gerlach@alaska.gov, sarah.coburn@alaska.gov].