

Pygmy Rabbits, RHDV2, and You

What is RHDV2?

RHDV2 stands for “rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2”, and is a fatal viral disease to rabbits with an estimated 90% mortality rate and no cure.

Important to note:

- The virus is present in all bodily fluids.
- The incubation period is 1-5 days.
 - Rabbits that survive exposure, can potentially carry and/or shed RHDV2 for up to 2 months.
- It is resistant to extreme temperatures, as well as freezing.

Transmission can occur through:

- 1) Contact with live or dead infected rabbits.
- 2) Contaminated bedding, food or water, or other equipment of domestic rabbits.
- 3) Via the eyes, nose, and mouth.

How to Reduce Transmission

- If you encounter multiple dead rabbits, report them to state wildlife officials and do NOT touch them!
- *Report dead or sick/injured animals [here](#).*
- Symptoms of RHDV2 in rabbits:
 - Bleeding from mouth or nose
 - Lethargy and disorientation
- Practice good biosecurity and personal hygiene.
 - Wash your hands!
 - Don't let your animals come into contact with feral rabbits.

Questions to Ask Yourself

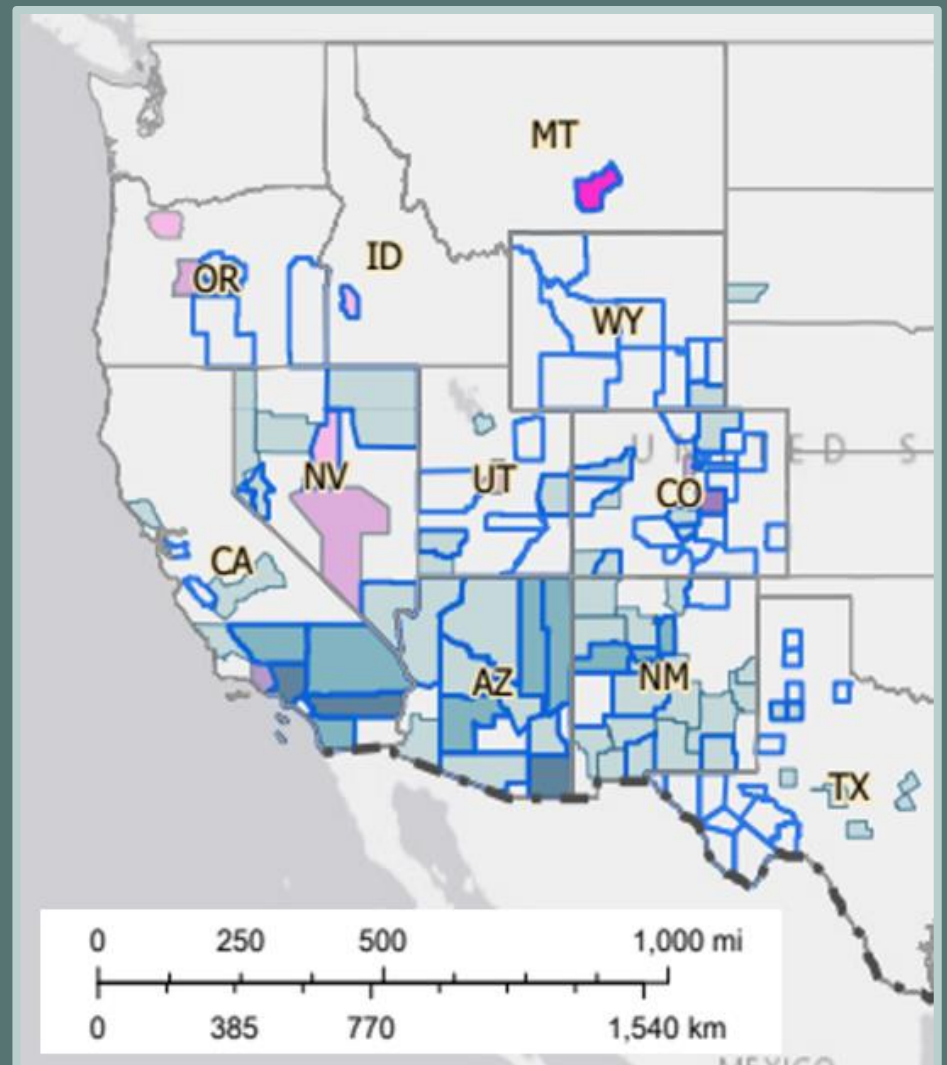
If you answer yes to any of the following questions, please clean and sanitize your personal equipment following the protocols below.

- 1) Have you been in a RHDV2 infected area in the last 90 days?
- 2) Do you own any rabbits or have you had contact with domestic rabbits within the last 90 days?
- 3) Are you unsure about your status of exposure?



RHDV2 in the U.S.

Current distribution of RHDV2:

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/maps/animal-health/rhd>



Cases Summary (Mar 2020 - Jan 2022)

-  Feral Domestic Cases
-  Domestic Cases
-  Wild Affected Counties

Everyday Cleaning Protocol

This everyday cleaning protocol should be used before working outdoors, to prevent spread of RHDV2 as well as dispersal of possible invasive seeds, parasites, or other contagious diseases.

- 1) Remove any organic material (mud, woody debris, feces, etc.) from clothing and equipment. This is crucial for the disinfectant to be effective.
- 2) Consider designating equipment (i.e., backpacks and clothes) specifically for field work. This will help to minimize the spread of RHDV2.
 - Wash your clothing before and after field work in a washing machine.
- 3) Wipe down all equipment with a 1:10 dilution household bleach + water, Virkon®, or 1-Stroke Environ®.

Sanitizing Exposed Field Equipment

Sanitizing process with chemical cleaners should be reserved for non-porous equipment such as trekking poles and hiking shoes.

- 1) After removing organic material, thoroughly wash and rinse your equipment with soap and potable water.
- 2) Submerge, saturate, or spray any exposed equipment with disinfectant. RHDV2 is inactivated by exposure to:
 - 5 minutes of 1:10 household bleach + water or accelerated hydrogen peroxide products (e.g. Rescue™).
- 3) Equipment must be saturated with your selected cleaning solution for the entire 5-minute duration.
- 4) Rinse with water and allow equipment to air dry.
- 5) For porous items that you may not want to use chemical cleaners on (i.e., clothing or backpacks) follow the above everyday cleaning protocol.

NOTE: Always follow disinfectant label instructions for proper use and safety, and never mix different types of disinfectants together.

Pygmy Rabbits and RHDV2

The Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit population is struggling with the effects of small population size, wildfires, intensive agriculture practices, and habitat loss and fragmentation.

Fortunately, RDHV2 has not yet infected the pygmy rabbit population in Washington state. Though WDFW has been diligently administering vaccines, it is imperative that volunteers are aware of exposure risk and help prevent the spread of RDHV2.



Importance of Protecting the Columbia Basin Pygmy Rabbits

The Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit has been a geographically isolated and genetically distinct population for over 10,000 years. They are recognized as an endangered population segment and are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Pygmy rabbits (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) are the smallest rabbit species in the world. While there are no recognized subspecies of pygmy rabbit, the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit population plays a unique ecological role in the Columbia Basin. The pygmy rabbit is one of two rabbit species in the U.S. that digs its own burrows, which provides important benefits to ecosystems like aerating the soil and providing shelter for other animals. As the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit population inhabits a rare ecosystem that primarily consist of sagebrush, they provide these important ecological services to sagebrush ecosystems.

Furthermore, pygmy rabbits rely on sagebrush for all their livelihood, comprising nearly 50% of summer diet and 99% of their winter diet. They even acquire their water from dew on sagebrush in dry months.

In 2008, the last purebred Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit passed away. The Columbia Basin pygmy rabbits that exist on the landscape today have a mixture of genetics from other populations and of their Columbia Basin ancestry, which is currently being maintained.

Please help the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit population by cleaning your equipment and clothing before you come volunteer!

Additional Resources

USDA Cleaning Protocols

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/downloads/rhdv-cleaning-guidance.pdf

Current Conservation Efforts

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/magazine/magazine-articles/pygmy-rabbits/>

Additional RHDV2 Information

https://www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Learning/documents/Species/Rabbit-Hemorrhagic-Disease-2_10_8_2020.pdf

Dead/Sick/Injured Wildlife Reporting

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/a384e90f69744f2e846135a9ce80027f>

Current distribution of the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit.

