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Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) Confirmed in Idaho Wild Jackrabbits

BOISE, ID – The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) announced today the confirmation of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) found in two wild jackrabbits located southwest of the Boise Airport in Ada County. This is first case of RHD identified in wild or domestic rabbits in Idaho.

RHD is not known to affect humans, livestock or any other species of pets. RHD has been identified in other states only in species of wild and domestic rabbits.

RHD is a highly contagious and often deadly virus in rabbits. It is spread through direct contact with an infected animal, carcass, contaminated food/water source or other material coming into direct with an infected rabbit. The virus may also be transmitted by insect vectors such as flies, fleas or mosquitos and can persist in the environment for an extended period of time, making it extremely difficult to eradicate in wild rabbit populations. RHD is known for having a high degree of mortality where, in many cases, the only clinical sign displayed by an infected rabbit is sudden death. In less acute cases, clinical signs may include dullness, loss of appetite, nasal hemorrhage (bloody nose) and congestion of the conjunctiva. Some affected rabbits may develop neurologic signs such as incoordination or seizure-like episodes. Infections in young or adolescent rabbits are usually less severe and death is not as likely.

Wild Rabbit Information

Do not touch any dead rabbits you may see near an area where RHD has been identified. Anyone encountering a dead wild rabbit is asked to leave the carcass in place and contact the IDFG:

- Report it online at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/conservation/wildlife-health/add>,
- Call Fish and Game's Wildlife Health Laboratory at (208) 939-9171, or
- Contact a regional Fish and Game office at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/offices>.

Owners of domestic rabbits should never release their rabbits into the wild.

Domestic Rabbit Information

"Rabbit owners need to be practicing enhanced biosecurity measures at all of their operations," said Dr. Scott Leibsle, State Veterinarian. "Prevention is the best disease mitigation strategy right now." ISDA recommends that domestic rabbit owners and breeders of pet, show and meat production rabbits incorporate strict biosecurity measures to protect their rabbits and prevent the spread of the disease. Several biosecurity measures are recommended:

- Do not house rabbits outdoors in areas of the state where RHD has been detected in wild rabbits.
- Take precautions to prevent wild rabbits from coming in contact with or gaining access to a rabbitry.
- Wash your hands with warm soapy water before and after handling a rabbit. Don protective clothing (boots, coveralls, etc) when entering a rabbitry.
- Equipment and cages moved on or off the premises should be cleaned and sanitized with 10% bleach water before returning to the rabbitry.
- Domestic rabbits suspected of being infected with RHD should be isolated immediately from other rabbits and any enclosures should be disinfected thoroughly.

ISDA is not asking domestic rabbit shows or exhibitions be cancelled at this time. If you suspect your rabbit may have RHD, contact your veterinarian immediately and notify the ISDA. RHD is a mandatory reportable disease in Idaho.

An approved RHD vaccine is not currently manufactured in the U.S. Individuals looking to vaccinate their rabbits should contact their veterinarian to arrange for import of a vaccine from European distributors. Veterinarians will need to contact the ISDA regarding the import approval process. Contact the ISDA for more information at (208) 332-8540 or info@isda.idaho.gov.

More information on RHD can be found on the USDA APHIS website https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf. Updates for domestic rabbit owners will be available on the ISDA website at <https://agri.idaho.gov/main/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease/>.