

Rabbit Calicivirus Information

Calicivirus is a disease used by farmers to reduce the number of rabbits in the wild.

Although wild rabbits are cute, the female can have between 40 and 50 babies in a year. The wild rabbits cause crop and land damage. This is an issue as the amount of grass eaten by 10 rabbits roughly equals what one sheep would eat. This means farmers have reduced pasture available to feed their stock, impacting on productivity and growth with the bottom-line inevitably affected.

The virus has a few names: Rabbit Calicivirus Disease (RHD), Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD), Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD). In this article we will refer to it just as calicivirus.

Originally, the virus was illegally imported from Australia in 1997 by farmers who were severely affected by the growing rabbit population. The virus can be transmitted in many ways making it an effective way for the farmers to control their rabbit problem. Unfortunately, the virus affects all rabbits equally, whether they are loved pets or wild bunnies.

Calicivirus symptoms are varied and there is not one specific symptom that appears to affect all rabbits. Sudden death is common and it is also possible to see some bleeding from anywhere. Please contact your vet if you are concerned in any way.

As the virus is spread so easily, hygiene measures are vital. The disease can also last up to 200 days in a place of infection. Hand washing, cleaning the hutch, run and rabbit accessories with a suitable disinfectant will help prevent the spread of calicivirus. Rabbits kept inside are at lower risk of getting calicivirus than those outside, and preventing your rabbit from having any contact with wild rabbits is an obvious precaution.

THE GOOD NEWS: we can currently protect our lovely pet rabbits by vaccinating them. As with all vaccinations, nothing can protect our pets 100%, but the vaccine is usually very effective, and it is one of the only things we can do to prevent our pet rabbits from dying unnecessarily.

Unfortunately, a new Korean strain of the calicivirus known as "K5" has been recently identified and there is a small chance the current rabbit vaccine does not completely protect our pet rabbits against it. Until this has been fully researched, it is advisable to stick to the current vaccination schedule, as there is every chance the vaccination may provide cover against K5 also. This is referred to as "cross protection".

OUR RABBITS SHOULD RECEIVE THEIR FIRST VACCINATION WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG.

- Rabbits 12 weeks or younger, will need 2 injections, 4 weeks apart.
- Rabbits over 12 weeks of age will only need one injection. Rabbits should then be re-vaccinate annually at their annual health check to maintain this protection.

