

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease



- Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild rabbits. The virus has recently been detected in wild cottontail rabbits and jackrabbits in the southwestern United States, including Colorado.

Species Affected in Colorado

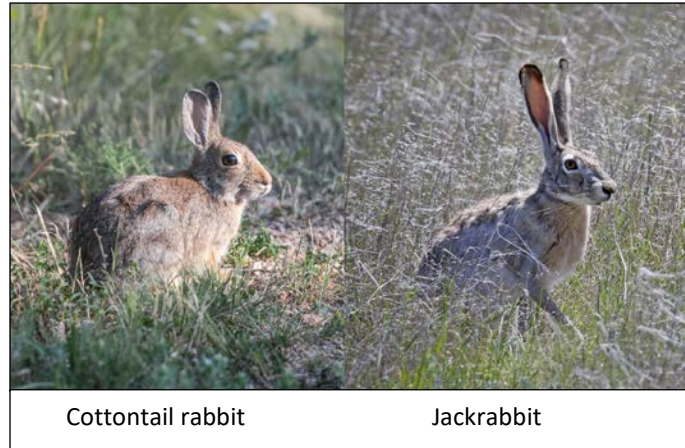
- Cottontail rabbit, jackrabbit
- Possibly snowshoe hare or pika

What to Look For

- Multiple sick or dead rabbits/hares
- Affected animals may have blood staining the nose and mouth.

Cause and Transmission

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus, serotype 2 (RHDV2) is a highly contagious calicivirus of domestic rabbits, cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, and other hares. Other rabbit-like (lagomorph) species may also be susceptible. Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is considered a foreign animal disease, meaning the disease is not typically found in the United States and is of high concern to domestic and wild animal health. There is currently very little data available on the impact of this disease in North American rabbit populations; however, preliminary information suggests that mortality could be high, with population impacts to rabbits and species that prey upon rabbits. This virus can be transmitted through contact with an infected rabbit, with body fluids or feces from an infected rabbit, or with a contaminated environment. The virus is very hardy and can survive on clothing, plant material, or other items that may be accidentally moved from an infected area. If you observe multiple dead or sick rabbits, please report these to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Before visiting other wild areas, wash clothing and disinfect footwear.



Cottontail rabbit

Jackrabbit

Public Health Concerns

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease is a serious disease of domestic rabbits. Rabbit owners should exercise extreme caution to avoid accidental exposure of rabbits to this disease. Domestic rabbits should not be housed outdoors in areas where rabbit hemorrhagic disease has been detected in wild rabbits. Contact your veterinarian for more information about this disease in domestic rabbits.

This disease is not infectious to people or domestic animals other than rabbits. However, multiple dead or sick rabbits can also be a sign of tularemia or plague, diseases that can cause serious illness in people. Do not handle or consume sick or dead wildlife, and do not allow pets to contact or consume wildlife carcasses.

References

USDA Fact Sheet on RHDV2: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf

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