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## Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus – AEVC Information as of January 2022

Rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV) is a highly contagious virus that has been found in rabbits across the USA, including Oregon, Washington and California among others. RHDV was confirmed in dead rabbits in SE Portland in March 2021. RHDV can cause fatal illness in domestic and wild rabbits, and no treatment has been successful for reversing rabbit hemorrhagic disease. The virus is readily transmitted between a variety of wild animal species (not just rabbits), and the virus is very persistent in the environment unless specific disinfectants are used against it. ***The two best ways to prevent RHDV affecting your rabbits are to practice strict “biosecurity” measures, and to vaccinate your rabbits against RHDV.***

**Biosecurity measures** include housing rabbits strictly indoors, protecting them against exposure to mosquitoes or flies that could carry virus in from outdoors, not feeding them any outdoor greens that have not been disinfected, and housing your rabbits away from all other rabbits. See the following website for recommendations regarding biosecurity practices and disinfection: <https://oda.direct/rhd>

**Vaccination** is also a good way to help prevent disease from the typical strain of RHDV. We at AEVC are able to vaccinate your rabbit during an Exam/Consultation appointment, as long as your rabbit is not showing a fever or signs of infectious disease at the time that might interfere with vaccine efficacy. Details of vaccination scheduling are listed here:

- To register as a new client with us, or to refresh your veterinarian-client-patient relationship with us if we have not examined your rabbit within the past year, visit our website at [www.avianexoticvetcare.com](http://www.avianexoticvetcare.com), click on “new client portal” at the upper right of our home web page, and complete the process including prepayment of a deposit toward your first appointment with us. We will contact you after that form and payment are completed to discuss scheduling your first appointment.
- If you are an existing client with us, and we have examined your rabbit within the past year, then please contact us via email at [AEVC.info@gmail.com](mailto:AEVC.info@gmail.com) or call us at 971-361-2209 to schedule an appointment for your rabbit.
- The currently available US-produced **Medgene** RHDV vaccine requires a 2-dose series (separated by 3 weeks) in the first year that your rabbit receives this product, ***even if your rabbit has been vaccinated against RHDV by the Filavac product in previous years.***
- We will ask for payment of a deposit equal to the cost of BOTH vaccine appointments before they are to be scheduled and confirmed. As this amount is higher than the amount of our new client registration prepayment deposit, the additional fees will be collected by us over the phone prior to your vaccination appointments being scheduled.
  - If your intention is to have your rabbit vaccinated without a comprehensive discussion of rabbit care and health recommendations, you should anticipate the total cost of the 2 vaccination appointments to be approximately \$182.
  - If your intention is to have your rabbit vaccinated as part of a comprehensive Consultation appointment, you should anticipate the total costs of the 2 visits to be \$217-292.
- If your rabbit is being vaccinated with the **Filavac** brand of vaccine (only available prior to February 20, 2022), it must be resident in Oregon or Washington, in human care rather than being a feral/wild rabbit, and it must be permanently identified. Our means of doing this involves implantation of a transponder microchip under the skin, usually in the region above the chest. The microchip implantation procedure is done with use of injected local anesthetics (lidocaine and bupivacaine, similar to novocaine) since the insertion needle is relatively large. We will use a universal sensor to determine whether your rabbit already has a transponder microchip, in which case we would not be needing to place one during the vaccination appointment. Transponder placement is not a requirement of the Medgene brand of vaccine.

***Because this disease is believed to be able to be prevented by vaccination, WE ARE REQUIRING ALL OF OUR RABBIT PATIENTS TO BE VACCINATED AGAINST RHDV as an integral part of responsible care.*** We will no longer maintain your rabbit as a patient if your rabbit has not been vaccinated against RHDV. If your rabbit has been vaccinated elsewhere against RHDV, we will require proof of vaccination.

Please be assured, we at AEVC are taking many precautions to prevent transmission of infectious agents between our rabbit patients, including the following:

- Checking every unvaccinated rabbit's rectal temperature immediately upon arrival at our clinic. This is due to the common feature of a fever in RHD. If your rabbit has a fever, we will immediately contact you to discuss what can be done next.
- Use of protective thermometer sleeves and sterile individual-use thermometer lubricant for each rabbit.
- Use of a disinfectant known to be effective against viruses of the RHDV category.
- Use of sterile surgical gowns by our veterinary assistants and technicians who are holding your unvaccinated rabbit during its appointment, and use of disposable table coverings that are changed between each appointment.
- Due to the personal protective equipment (PPE) that we are using just for your rabbit, there is a small PPE fee assessed to you as part of the first vaccination appointment.

Information about the **Filavac** VHD K C+V vaccine that we have been using for RHDV vaccination (this product is no longer available by February 2022):

- This vaccine is not licensed in the USA and is being used under a special research and evaluation import permit from the USDA (US Department of Agriculture).
- This vaccine does not guarantee full protection against rabbit hemorrhagic disease. However, the expectation is that the likelihood of protection is high, and that the onset of immunity will occur by 1 week after administration of this vaccine. The expectation is also that immunity will last approximately 1 year. Booster vaccination on an annual basis is therefore recommended.
- Possible adverse reactions that can be seen include: a temporary increase in body temperature (up to 3 degrees F, 1.6 degrees C), nodule formation at the site of vaccine injection (up to 10mm, almost ½ inch) in diameter but the nodule should disappear within 2 months without need for treatment, lethargy, digestive upset (GI stasis), anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) and death.
- The efficacy of the vaccine in rabbits younger than 10 weeks of age has not been demonstrated. No reports of abortion after vaccination have been published. It is not absolutely certain whether the vaccine will cause abortion or affect fertility otherwise.
- There is currently no medical data on the interaction of this vaccine with other medical products.

Information about the **Medgene** RHDV vaccine that we are using for RHDV vaccination January 2022 and beyond:

- Medgene Labs is providing vaccine for veterinarians through a USDA Emergency Use Authorization. According to Medgene's data, the vaccine has been highly effective in preventing death in vaccinated rabbits if they are challenged with live RHDV type-2 virus (the type that has been seen in the USA).
- The vaccine is a recombinant subunit vaccine that builds immunity to RHDV type-2 antigenic proteins in the rabbit. The vaccine only uses parts of the RHDV type-2 virus, not the full virus, so it is impossible for the vaccine to cause RHD in your rabbit.
- The vaccine is safe for rabbits as young as 4 weeks old, but has not been investigated in pregnant or nursing does.
- Possible adverse effects of vaccination include a small swelling at the vaccine injection site, or mild fever, or lethargy for 1 to 2 days. GI stasis is not mentioned by Medgene but is also assumed to be a possible adverse effect.
- 2 doses are required, 3 weeks apart. The vaccination series is expected to be fully protective by 2 weeks after the second dose is performed, therefore about 5 weeks after the first dose.

On the day that we are vaccinating your rabbit, we will require you to affirm and sign a form stating the following:

- That if any side effects from the vaccine or the vaccination procedure are found in your rabbit(s), you will not hold Avian and Exotic Veterinary Care, the veterinarian or staff members responsible;
- That you assume full responsibility for any treatment costs associated with vaccination side effects in your rabbit(s);
- And that the rabbits to be vaccinated are eating and passing feces normally today, and that you are not aware of any reason that they are not fit for vaccination.

**Oregon Department of Agriculture's up-to-date guidance and information for rabbit owners:** <https://oda.direct/rhd>