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All Rabbit Exhibitions Banned in Oklahoma for Ninety Days

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. – Oklahoma State Veterinarian, Dr. Rod Hall, has banned all rabbit exhibitions in the state until September 24, 2020, to allow time to assess the scope and range of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHD) in the region surrounding Oklahoma.

“It is essential to stop commingling of rabbits until we have a better understanding of the disease prevalence and better tools to prevent disease transmission,” said Dr. Hall in the ban released this morning. “I encourage all owners and breeders of pet, show, and meat production rabbits to immediately institute strict biosecurity to protect your rabbits.”

Detections of RHD have occurred in the United States, notably in Texas, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona. RHD is a highly contagious and lethal virus found among both domestic and wild rabbits. RHD appears only to affect rabbit species (lagomorphs). **It is not known to affect humans, livestock or pets other than rabbits.** However, pets should not be allowed to consume dead animal carcasses.

Often the only clinical sign is sudden death. In less acute cases, clinical signs may include the following: dullness/apathy, not eating, ocular and/or nasal hemorrhage and congestion of the conjunctiva. Some may develop neurological signs such as incoordination, excitement or seizure like episodes. Infections in younger rabbits can be less severe and deaths are not as likely.

This is a highly contagious disease that spreads between rabbits through contact with infected rabbits or carcasses, their meat or their fur, contaminated food or water, or materials coming in contact with them. This virus can also be transmitted by insects such as fleas, flies and mosquitos. RHD can persist in the environment for a very long time. These factors make disease control efforts extremely challenging once it is in the wild rabbit populations.

Guidelines for Wild Cottontails, Hares, and Pika

- Please report any sick/dead wild rabbits, hares or pika to the **Dept. of Wildlife Conservation**
- Do not handle rabbits or rodents that have been found dead.
- Do not allow pets or scavengers to feed on found carcasses. Though RHD is not a risk to pets other than domestic rabbits, a number of other pathogens and parasites from carcasses can affect pets.
- Do not handle or consume rabbits or other game animals that appear to be sick. Instead, report these cases to the **Dept. of Wildlife Conservation**
- Meat from healthy rabbits harvested by hunters is safe to consume when cooked thoroughly.

Guidelines for Domestic Rabbits

- Rabbit owners should exercise extreme caution and biosecurity to avoid accidental exposure of domestic rabbits through contaminated feed, bedding, equipment, or clothing that may have come in contact with infected wild rabbits or birds that could transfer the virus from infected wild rabbits.

- 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.
- Please report any sick or dead domestic rabbits that may have RHD to the **State Veterinarian's office**

You can find more information on RHD in the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service fact sheet at https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/fs-rhdv2.pdf .

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