



## AHL LabNote Number 66

November 2022

### RHDV (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus) testing at AHL

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) is a sudden, highly contagious and fatal viral disease of rabbits. RHD affects rabbits of the *Oryctolagus cuniculus* species, including wild and domestic European rabbits, from which our own domestic rabbits are descended.

In Canada, rabbit haemorrhagic disease is an immediately notifiable disease under the Health of Animals Act. Only laboratories are required to contact the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regarding the suspicion or diagnosis of one of these diseases.

PCR testing for RHDV2 is now available at AHL.

#### For pet (non-commercial) rabbits:

1. Submit the rabbit (or samples) to AHL for a full postmortem (and ancillary testing) to determine the cause of death. This comprehensive diagnostic testing will be charged to the submitting veterinary clinic. If RHD cannot be ruled-out, AHL will add RHDV2 testing (fee based) to confirm.
2. For suspicion of RHDV2 only - Submit appropriate tissue samples (fresh liver, spleen, lung, lymph node) or the entire rabbit carcass to AHL for tissue collection and testing. Note that if the whole carcass is submitted, no other diagnostic testing will be performed to determine the cause of death, however, there is a charge for tissue collection and the RHDV2 PCR, which is less costly than a full post mortem.
3. If regular testing is cost-prohibitive, limited funding is available through the Ontario Animal Health Network RHD surveillance project for subsidized testing of deceased domestic rabbits that meet specific high-risk criteria for RHDV. For questions regarding inclusion of a case in this surveillance study, please contact OMAFRA's Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300 during regular business hours.

**Note:** Appropriate biocontainment (i.e. cleaning and disinfection) should be taken into consideration when collecting samples from or handling carcasses of suspect animals. For advice regarding biosecurity measures, refer to the following advisory from OMAFRA ([Veterinarian Advisory: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus 2](#)).

**For rabbits originating from commercial premises:** (e.g. commercial rabbitry, rabbit meat facility, export-related facility)

If there is a suspicion of RHDV please submit as per steps 1 (as part of a full post mortem workup or sampling and submission of samples by a veterinarian) or step 2 (to rule out just RHDV2) above.

**Positive RHDV2 diagnoses in any of these cases will be treated as any immediately notifiable disease and AHL will notify both CFIA and OMAFRA of the results.**

Please contact AHL for fees associated with these submissions. Fees can only be relayed to the submitting veterinary clinic. Veterinarians and veterinary clinics can obtain access to our online fee schedule via this link:

[Register](#)

AHL does not have a VCPR with owners and requires a veterinarian to be involved in every case for interpretation and management of results. Cases are not accepted from owners without this veterinary involvement.

If veterinarians have any questions about RHDV testing, they can email [ahlinfo@uoguelph.ca](mailto:ahlinfo@uoguelph.ca) or call the laboratory directly: Guelph 519-824-4120 ext 54530 or Kemptville 613-258-8320.

Jim Fairles

Client Services Veterinarian AHL

[CFIA Fact Sheet on RHDV](#)

[OMAFRA Fact Sheet for owners](#)

[OMAFRA Fact Sheet for veterinarians](#)

[Information from Dr Scott Weese – Worms and Germs Blog](#)