



Dr. Scott Phearman
Dr. Katrina Gustafson

January 15th, 2022

Vaccine Authorized for Highly Contagious & Deadly Rabbit Disease Recently Confirmed in Pet Rabbits in Minnesota

I would like to inform you about an emerging rabbit viral disease that was introduced into the United States back in 2018 and has been carefully tracked since then. The first confirmed cases in Minnesota occurred the last half of 2021 in the Twin Cities area. Two rabbits were affected in one household and both animals died.

This viral disease is called Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease and the second variant (RHDV2) is highly contagious, extremely stable and carries a very high mortality rate. This is a virus that can infect both wild and domestic rabbits but not other species.

I have two online resources with good information for you to learn more about this disease. There are links to these pages on our website WatertownVeterinaryClinic.com under the Informational Pages drop down list. One of these is sponsored by Peacebunny Island Foundation which is dedicated to this disease. Their website is rhdv2.com and has the history, list of symptoms and other good information about the disease. Make sure to check out the tab on BIOSECURITY, as this is now important for all rabbits, but especially for those that are not vaccinated. The other site is the MN Board of Animal Health. Their website is bah.state.mn.us/rabbit-hemorrhagic-disease/.

There is now conditional use availability of a new mRNA vaccine for this disease created by Medgene labs in South Dakota. Due to the conditional use status of this vaccine and the multi dose vials that are available at this time, we have decided to hold vaccine clinics at our facility, scheduled on Saturday mornings, two appointments three weeks apart. Individual dose vials may not be available until 2023 or 2024 according to the manufacturer. It is possible that this will become an annual vaccine in rabbits, but research is still ongoing. This vaccine has been proven to be extremely protective (90-100%) so it is strongly recommended for ALL rabbits.

Our first vaccine clinic will be on Saturday, January 29th with the follow-up booster scheduled on Saturday, February 19th. It is important to have the boosters at the 3 week mark, so both appointments would be scheduled at the same time slot and prepaid at the time of confirmation of the appointments.

The cost will be set at \$85 flat fee per rabbit. This will include brief exams, both vaccine boosters and the microchip if needed at no extra charge (chips will not be registered but owners can sign up for chip registry services on their own if desired). All rabbits will need to have a microchip, so if yours does not have one, we will implant a small microchip under the skin at the time of the first appointment. If you are on a budget and have more than one rabbit, consider doing one at a time scheduled in different vaccine clinics.

I have helped with a few of the large vaccine clinics provided through Peacebunny Foundation earlier this fall/winter, and the rabbits handled the vaccines and microchips well. There will be other larger vaccine clinics available through some of the FFA and 4-H groups this spring as well as through Peacebunny Foundation, but I want to get some of our clients' rabbits taken care of before spring thaw if possible.



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Please email us (watvetclin@gmail.com) or call (952-955-1525) and leave a voicemail message if we do not answer and let us know if you are interested in the first clinic on January 29th or if you want to be on notification lists for future clinics. Limited time slots will be available on a first come-first serve basis, likely between 8 am and noon.

We plan to do the clinics curbside for biosecurity reasons. Owners will need to have their rabbits in crates or carriers that our staff can take from your vehicle while you wait for us to give the vaccine. We will have you wait 10-15 minutes in our parking lot after the vaccine is given to make sure there are not any noticed reactions in that time.

Rabbits will need to be healthy in order to get the vaccine. Some chronic health conditions may be allowed. If you have any questions about this, please let us know.

We hope to get as many of our rabbit patients vaccinated as possible, but this will take time. I will be helping with other vaccine clinics as well, so will keep you all updated if other clinics become available through other groups in our area.

Sincerely,

Katrina Gustafson, DVM