



Media Statement

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Reminder for pet rabbit owners

Rabbit owners are advised to take steps to protect their pets from a new strain of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus which is being released across Australia.

The virus, known as RHDV1 K5, will be released at 600 sites across the country and more than 100 sites in Western Australia in the first week of March to control pest rabbits which wreak havoc on the environment and biodiversity.

The Department of Agriculture and Food is providing support to WA landholders and community groups involved in the national release. The virus will be a vital tool in helping to reduce the population of pest rabbits.

The department is alerting owners of domestic rabbits to ensure they are aware of the virus and remind them to continue to protect their pet rabbits from infection as they would for the existing strain of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus.

The virus is a naturally occurring variant of the virus that was released in Australia in 1996, and is now widespread.

The same vaccine is available for both strains and rabbit owners are urged to contact their local veterinarian for advice on vaccination.

The virus is contagious and can be spread by direct contact or by insect vectors. In addition to vaccination, the following precautions may assist in minimising the risk of infection:

- keep pet rabbit indoors
- rabbit-proof backyards to prevent access by pest rabbits
- regularly decontaminate hutches, bowls etc with either 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide
- limit contact between and handling of unfamiliar pet rabbits
- decontaminate hands, shoes and clothing after handling rabbits other than your own
- control insects (especially fleas and flies)
- remove uneaten food on a daily basis

The [Australian Veterinary Association](#) website and [DAFWA's RHDV1 K5 web pages](#) provide further advice on vaccinations and other protective measures.

For further enquiries, contact the Department of Agriculture and Food on (08) 97806230

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