

# Rabbit Owners Urged To Vaccinate Pet Rabbits Against Deadly Virus For Rabbit Awareness Week

Submitted by: Rabbit Awareness Week

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June 1–9 is Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW), an annual campaign raising awareness around the welfare needs of pet rabbits in the UK and Ireland.

Rabbit Awareness Week is organised by Burgess Pet Care and supported by the UK's largest animal welfare organisations and charities. This year's campaign is urging rabbit owners to vaccinate their rabbits to protect them against a deadly rabbit disease that is sweeping across the UK and Ireland.

Rabbit viral haemorrhagic disease 2 (RVHD2) is highly infectious, with little or no symptoms, and causes sudden death in rabbits by internal bleeding. Vaccination is the most effective way to protect rabbits against RVHD2 and other diseases but only 14% of pet rabbits are vaccinated against RVHD2. The lives of unvaccinated rabbits are at risk, as outbreaks of the disease has been reported all over the UK and Ireland.

Dr Suzanne Moyes MVB MRCVS, Technical Director at Burgess Pet Care, who lead on the campaign, said:

“Rabbits make absolutely fantastic pets but they're also one of the most misunderstood. Rabbits have very complicated welfare needs and there are a number of areas that need improving when it comes to rabbit ownership, especially preventative healthcare, so RAW provides an amazing opportunity for rabbit owners to make sure their rabbits are as healthy and happy as they should be.

“Rabbits are at risk from a variety of deadly diseases, including myxomatosis, rabbit viral haemorrhagic disease and rabbit viral haemorrhagic disease 2. Whilst these diseases are deadly, they are preventable with the correct vaccinations: a joint vaccination for RVHD/ myxomatosis and a separate vaccination for RVHD2. Without these vaccinations, rabbit owners are putting their pets' lives at risk. We are urging all rabbit owners to make sure their pet rabbits are vaccinated for Rabbit Awareness Week.”

Research from the latest PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report found that there are 1million pet rabbits in the UK but only 34% of these are registered with a vet. As a prey species, rabbits are particularly good at hiding signs of illness, so regular visits to the vet and health checks are essential to keep rabbits healthy and happy.

PDSA Vet Nurse Kristiana Shirley said:

“Vaccinations are absolutely essential to protect rabbits against devastating diseases. Findings from our 2018 PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report revealed that the main reasons rabbit owners didn't vaccinate their rabbits were that their bunnies didn't come into contact with other animals; they don't think it's necessary or that it's too expensive.

“We want to spread the message that all unvaccinated bunnies are at risk from diseases like RVHD-2, even if their rabbit doesn't come into contact with other animals or wildlife. Infections can be

carried on owners' shoes or clothes, with other pets, and even via insects. Luckily a simple vaccination can keep your rabbits safe. It's worth the small cost to prevent heartbreak."

The PDSA PAW Report also found that 54% of pet rabbits in the UK live alone, but professional advice suggests rabbits should be kept with at least one other suitable rabbit companion. The same report found 28% of pet rabbits live in a hutch or cage that is too small and 20% of pet rabbits are still being fed muesli, despite research showing a link between muesli diets and the development of fatal health issues.

Veterinary practices, rescue centres, pet shop retailers and schools are holding a variety of events throughout the week of RAW to help educate rabbit owners around the welfare needs of their pets.

- The RSPCA will be hosting a live Q&A on their social media channels Wednesday 5th June 12:30–13:30 and are holding events at some of their sites.
- PDSA, Wood Green and Blue Cross hospitals will be holding free health checks at select locations throughout the week of RAW.
- The Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund is hosting their rabbit owner conference at the Birmingham Conference & Events Centre 1st June.

Caroline Allen, Chief Veterinary Officer at the RSPCA said:

"Rabbit Awareness Week is a fantastic opportunity for vets, animal welfare organisations and rescue centres to join together with pet owners to promote rabbit welfare. Rabbits are one of our most misunderstood pets and, by supporting Rabbit Awareness Week once again, the RSPCA is helping owners better meet the welfare needs of their pets."

This year's Rabbit Awareness Week campaign takes place June 1–9. Owners can download their free rabbit care guide and find the location of their nearest RAW event by visiting

<https://www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/find-a-raw-event/>

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#### NOTE TO EDITORS

For more information and expert advice from small animal experts in the veterinary profession, please contact (on behalf of Burgess Pet Care) Mat Ombler, PR Account Manager at Fred Marketing on +44 (0)1482 227227 or email [mat@fredmarketing.co.uk](mailto:mat@fredmarketing.co.uk)

Assets: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/79wvsa98mlyt470/AACF-SI1-A9KVg4k4f0tuaA1a?dl=0>

About Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 2 (RVHD2).

Rabbit viral haemorrhagic disease 2 (RVHD2) is a new strain of the virus RVHD1. Cases of the disease were first reported in the UK in 2013. As with RVHD1 the virus causes internal bleeding.

## Symptoms

RVHD2 often has no symptoms, meaning that it is very hard to spot early on. Where symptoms do occur, these signs are easily confused with other health conditions: fever, lethargy, neurological signs (coma) and blood clotting problems.

## Mode of transmission

It is a myth that RVHD2 can only be caught through contact with an infected rabbit. In actual fact the virus can be carried by:

- birds, insects and their droppings
- airborne
- soles of shoes
- car tyres
- other pets' feet
- an infected rabbit or their droppings
- owners' hands or clothes

This is just a small section of the list of ways RVHD2 can be carried. Practically, there is no way to stop the virus getting into your rabbits' indoor or outdoor environment. Therefore, the only way to protect your rabbits is through vaccination.

## Prevention

Your vet can vaccinate your rabbits against RVHD2 (this is a separate vaccination to the combined myxomatosis/RVHD1 vaccine). Your vet will then advise what booster vaccinations your rabbit will need (usually every 6-12 months).

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment available for RVHD2, though your vet can offer supportive care.

## Prognosis

There have been some cases where rabbits have recovered from RVHD2. However, in most cases the disease is fatal.

Rabbit owners who have experienced the sudden death of a rabbit with no explanation are strongly advised to take them to a vet to help identify the scale of the outbreak. Many sudden deaths are not being reported to vets and due to the nature of the disease, diagnosis of RVHD2 can only be officially confirmed with a liver biopsy test and/or full post mortem.

About Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW)  
<http://www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/>

<http://www.twitter.com/rabbitawarenessweek/>  
<http://www.facebook.com/rabbitawarenessweek/>

- RAW is a coalition of experts, organisations and welfare charities who actively campaign to improve the lives of pet rabbits. Organised by Burgess Pet Care, official RAW partners include the RSPCA, Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWAF), Wood Green The Animals Charity, PDSA and Blue Cross.

- Social media users can join the conversation online using #RAW2019  
For more information on RAW, please visit the RAW website.

Burgess Pet Care  
[www.burgesspetcare.com](http://www.burgesspetcare.com)

Burgess Pet Care is a national animal feed and pet food supplier and manufacturer. As a family-owned business with over 300 years of history, the health and wellbeing of animals is Burgess Pet Care's number one goal. They actively work with a number of leading charities to help educate and raise awareness around animal welfare needs and are the main organisers of Rabbit Awareness Week.