

# Britain's Rabbits At Risk From Deadly Viral Outbreak That Kills In 24 Hours, Experts Warn

Submitted by: Rabbit Awareness Week

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- Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) 2019 campaign urges rabbit owners to "Protect and Prevent" against deadly and highly infectious virus strain, Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 2 (RVHD2), following thousands of reports from distraught rabbits owners.

- Outbreaks of RVHD2 have been reported all over the UK. Death is caused by internal bleeding, meaning many owners don't notice any symptoms before it's too late.

- Vaccination is the only way to protect against the disease but less than 15% of pet rabbits in the UK are vaccinated against the disease.

LONDON, 09.04.19 – The 13th annual Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) campaign will take place between June 1–9 and is urging rabbit owners to get their bunnies vaccinated against the outbreak of a deadly rabbit virus strain that is killing rabbits across the country.

Outbreaks of the highly infectious Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease type 2 (RVHD2) have now been reported across the UK and Ireland. No area is safe. The disease can kill within hours with few or no symptoms, meaning it is often too late for treatment when owners realise something is wrong with their rabbits.

Vaccination is the safest and most effective way to protect against the disease but vets are warning that not enough bunnies in the UK are vaccinated. Protection against RVHD2 requires at least annual vaccination but the most recent figures show that only 137,405 vaccinations have been distributed in the last year – meaning less than 15% of Britain's pet rabbit population is protected against the disease.

This year's RAW Protect and Prevent campaign wants to address this issue and save the lives of as many pet rabbits in the UK as possible. It is urging owners to visit their vet to get their rabbits vaccinated to protect them against RVHD2 and help prevent the disease spreading.

RAW was created by Burgess Pet Care over 13 years ago to improve the health and wellbeing of the UK's rabbits. Supported by the UK's leading animal welfare organisations, charities and veterinary professionals, this year's campaign is a matter of life and death.

Alex Thorne at Burgess Pet Care said:

"The RAW partners are continuously receiving calls from devastated rabbit owners who have lost their pet rabbits to RVHD2 because they weren't vaccinated. There are still so many rabbit owners who aren't aware of the disease and this needs to change. RVHD2 has claimed the lives of too many rabbits and we don't want anyone else to lose their beloved pets to a preventable disease.

"RVHD2 is preventable with the right vaccination. As the disease has been reported all over the UK, there is a real urgency for UK rabbit owners to get their bunnies vaccinated as soon as possible. There

is a common misconception that rabbits living indoors, or in cities, are safe but this simply isn't true. We're urging every owner out there with unvaccinated bunnies to contact their vet as soon as possible to make sure that they are protected against RVHD2, and to play their part in preventing the further spread of the disease."

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. Rabbit owners show just as much love and affection to their bunnies as dog and cat owners do to their pets, but sadly, our Report shows they are less likely to be aware of the importance of preventive healthcare.

"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."

Preventative healthcare in rabbits is a hugely neglected area. 34% of rabbits are not currently registered with a vet. It is recommended that rabbit owners regularly visit vets to get booster vaccinations and healthcare checks.

Caroline Allen, London Veterinary Director at the RSPCA said:

"As well as providing vital protection against killer diseases when you visit your vet for a vaccination, it's a great opportunity for your rabbits to have a 'health MOT'. Sadly, far too many rabbits are still dying from totally preventable diseases and regular vaccinations and health checks are a vital part of keeping your rabbits healthy and safe.

"If anyone is thinking about getting rabbits we would encourage them to consider giving a second chance to a pair of our rescue rabbits. RSPCA rabbits are neutered, microchipped and have received their vaccinations. Not only is it a great way of giving an animal in need a new home but ensures your new rabbit have received essential preventative health care."

This year's RAW will take place between June 1-9 and is a fantastic opportunity to learn more about one of Britain's most misunderstood animals.

Rabbits make fantastic pets but do have very complicated welfare needs. The RAW partners strongly recommend extensive research and professional advice is sought by anyone wishing to welcome pet rabbits into their home.

Reputable rescue centres are able to neuter, vaccinate and provide a wealth of knowledge and support to new rabbit owners, who should always seek to rehome rabbits where possible.

There are a number of free resources available for owners on the Rabbit Awareness Week website including a rabbit care guide and other useful information.

For more expert advice on rabbit welfare and top tips on responsible ownership, please visit the official RAW website [www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk](http://www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk)

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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)

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 UK rabbits. Organised by Burgess Pet Care, official RAW partners include the RSPCA, Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWF), 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.

## About 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.