

# Protecting pet rabbits from calicivirus in South Australia

A new strain of calicivirus or rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV) known as K5-RHDV1, or simply K5, is **being released in Australia in March 2017** to help combat the impact of the wild rabbit population.

It is important for pet rabbit owners to vaccinate their animals.

## About the current vaccination

The current [Cylap vaccine](#), used to protect rabbits in Australia against RHDV1 for the past 20 years, is suitable for protecting rabbits against the new K5 strain.

Cylap has been used in Europe for decades to protect rabbits against a range of RHDV1 strains, including many that are very similar to K5.

There is good evidence from trials conducted as part of the planning for the possible release of K5 that the Cylap vaccine is effective – in a NSW Government research trial, all rabbits vaccinated with Cylap and then given a large dose of K5 virus survived, but all unvaccinated rabbits died when given a large dose of K5.

Vaccines deteriorate if not properly refrigerated, **so it is very important to ensure that the vaccine has been handled, transported and stored correctly before being administered by a trained veterinarian.** Failure to do this properly can lead to perceived vaccine “failures”.

## Managing the spread of RHDV

RHDV can be spread by many means, including contact between uninfected and infected rabbits, rabbit fleas feeding on infected rabbits, and by flies feeding on dead rabbits.

The other common rabbit disease, myxomatosis, is spread primarily by mosquito bites.

Rabbits are also at risk from the field strains of RHDV1 that have been circulating in wild rabbit populations since 1995.

Rabbits may be protected by keeping them inside or in insect-proof cages.

## Key points

- To combat the threat of rabbits within Australia, the national release of a RHDV1 K5 will take place during March 2017.
- The current Cylap vaccine, available in Australia, provides effective protection against the original calicivirus (RHDV1) and the new strain to be released in March 2017 (RHDV1 K5).
- The vaccine must be handled and administered correctly to ensure it is effective.
- The current Cylap vaccine available in Australia is not fully effective against RHDV2.
- Always keep your rabbit inside or in an insect-proof enclosure.

# Protecting pet rabbits from calicivirus in South Australia

STRAIN	WHEN	HOW	VACCINE AVAILABLE
RHDV1	1995	Original Czech strain of the calicivirus introduced	YES - if correct vaccination protocols are followed
RHDV2	First recorded in Australia in mid-2015	UNCERTAIN	NO
RHDV1 K5	March 2017	National release by Federal and State Governments under strict scientific controls	YES - if correct vaccination protocols are followed

## More information

**PestSmart**

[www.pestsmart.org.au](http://www.pestsmart.org.au)

**Australian Veterinary Association**

[www.ava.com.au](http://www.ava.com.au)

**Primary Industries and Region SA**

[www.pir.sa.gov.au](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au)

### WHAT ABOUT THE “OTHER” CALICIVIRUS – RHDV2?

Many people have become confused with information relating to another rabbit calicivirus, called RHDV2.

RHDV2 originated in France in 2010 and spread rapidly through western Europe. It has also spread into domestic rabbits in Canada and west Africa, areas where there are no wild rabbits.

It was detected in Australia in 2015 but it was NOT deliberately introduced to Australia, and has never been released by Government officers.

RHDV2 has spread throughout Australia, including across South Australia in 2016.