



Summer Owners News letter 2025



**RVHD2 'HV'
strain and vaccine
FAQ for rabbit
owners and
guardians.**

Q1 Why do I need to give two vaccines now?

A1 “Highly Virulent” Strains of RVHD2 have been reported in Continental Europe. There is only one vaccine licenced to protect against these, and so we are recommending that your rabbits are given a dose of that in addition to a vaccine which covers both RVHD and myxomatosis.

Q2 Is there any evidence that the HV exists?

A2 There is certainly published proof that different strains, some of which are designated HV, are present in Europe. The new vaccine has a licence specifically to cover HV strains, for that very reason.

Q3 Is there any evidence that the HV strain is in the UK?

A3 No, but this is because there is no active surveillance program for this disease, and there is, currently, no commercially available test to distinguish Classical RVHD2 from HV strains.

Q4 Are the vaccines safe to give 2 weeks apart?

A4 No work is ever carried out on safety of vaccines from different companies given together. So, the industry standard has long been to advise that they are given a minimum of 2 weeks apart. If you want to be even more sure that they are safe for your rabbit, they can be given further apart than 2 weeks, with the only downside to that being that one would wish your rabbits to be protected against all diseases as soon as possible, which this delays happening.

Q5 Will I be over dosing my rabbits vaccines?

A5 In the study carried out by the manufacturers of the current main vaccine, 2 rabbits out of a test group of 10 totally failed to respond to the vaccine, and had no protection. When they were challenged with RVHD2, they died. We feel that having an additional vaccine will increase rabbits’ immunity, and that the risk of any “over-vaccination” is outweighed by what would, at present, appear to be significant “under vaccination”

Q6 Is the new vaccine safe, been properly tested etc?

A6 It has received full testing and approval, the same as any other vaccine or medical product for animals. Concerns about it being new can also be addressed by pointing out that this vaccine is an updated version of a previous vaccine made by the same company, which was effective against the classical, but not the HV strain. This had been on the market being used for decades.

Q7 When is the new vaccine available?

A7 Now. However, initial supplies have been a bit erratic. We expect this to become smoother and easier to obtain, in all dose sizes, soon.

Q8 Have RVHD deaths increased because of the new strain?

A8 Unknown, but it would help if the manufacturer could be transparent with their data on this and a number of other areas. We (RWA&F and associated individuals) have set up surveillance on this and other areas to attempt to gather information which would help rabbits in the UK in future. We also know that rabbits vaccinated by the ‘triple’ vaccine have died, as mentioned in Q5.

Q9 What is the cost of the new vaccine?

A9 We are not permitted to give out this information. You would need to check directly with your veterinary practice of choice. Note that not all vets are stocking this vaccine, and prices will vary depending on package size, number of rabbit clients and other factors.

Q10 What is the ideal vaccine schedule now?

A10 We cannot give specific schedules out as this is an area to discuss with your own vet. We would suggest that both vaccines given, at least 2 weeks apart, provide the most comprehensive cover for rabbits in general, but that the protocol for individual rabbits should be determined, after discussion between you and your vet

Q 11 What if my rabbit has health problems, like EC, will a double vaccination be risky?

A 11 We cannot give specific schedules out as this is an area to discuss with your own vet.

Q12 – Will my rabbit be off colour after vaccination?

A12 The new vaccine is an ‘inactivated virus’ so the rabbits will not be vaccinated with a live version of. If any rabbits seem off colour after being vaccinated with the RVHD HV vaccine it is more likely due to it challenging their immune system, and the vast majority of rabbits recover in a short space of time.

However, if your rabbits have any underlying health conditions anything that challenges their immune system can make it flare up. They could have underlying health conditions that you are not aware of, of course because rabbits are good at hiding them. So for any rabbits who have health conditions, or who are elderly, you need to discuss with your vet and weigh up the risk of not vaccinating versus the short-term effects on their immune system.

