

# B i r d & E x o t i c s V e t e r i n a r i a n

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## **RABBIT CALICIVIRUS (Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease)**

### **1. What is Rabbit Calicivirus?**

'Rabbit Calicivirus' is a viral disease which was released into Australia. The virus spreads easily within the wild and pet rabbit populations. Pet rabbits often have very low immunity to the virus and so disease in these rabbits is severe and generally fatal.

### **2. How is the virus transmitted?**

The virus is transmitted (spread) directly from rabbit to rabbit, on cage materials or feed. It is also spread by certain insects or by inhaling particles of virus from the air. Indoor rabbits can still catch the virus.

### **3. What are the clinical signs of Rabbit Calicivirus?**

- Often illness is sudden in onset and quickly progresses to death
- Fever
- Depression
- Weight Loss
- Diarrhoea
- Bleeding from the nose or ears
- Death occurs in almost 100% of cases

### **4. Which rabbits are most at risk?**

All unvaccinated rabbits – including indoor rabbits – are at risk from calicivirus. Young rabbits may initially be protected by their mother's immune system. This maternal immunity decreases over time and so young rabbits must be vaccinated by 2 ½ months of age.

### **5. How do I protect my rabbit?**

It is extremely important that all rabbits be regularly vaccinated against calicivirus to prevent the disease. Once they have the disease hospital treatments are unlikely to help and most will die.

Our recommended vaccination program is:

- First vaccination before or at 2 ½ months of age
- Booster vaccination 1 month later
- Booster injections every 6-12 months

### **6. Are there any risks to vaccination?**

In occasional cases a skin irritation can occur at the site of vaccination. This may also involve some hair loss at the same site. In most rabbits these skin problems heal without the need for treatment.