natural resource management program

GeoCatch

Leschenault BIOSECURITY GROUP INC.



Geographe Rabbit Control Program (Calicivirus RHDV1-K5)

Participant Guidance



30-50CM

1 Preparation

IMPORTANT: Check for kittens (baby rabbits). Do not release virus into breeding populations; i.e., where kittens are sighted.

- What you need:
  - 4-6 feeding "dishes" ~30-50 cm in diameter (plant pot trays or bucket lids)
  - "Clipped/dressed" oats (available at most rural supply stores)





2 Feeding Site(s) Selection (~2 WEEKS BEFORE)

- **Trial different locations** on your property to identify best feeding site(s)
- **Where to look:** near warrens (under logs, sheds, shipping containers, etc), lawn, veggie patches or other known feeding areas
- **Put oats out in the evening** when rabbits are most active
- **Check & remove or cover up dishes early each morning** to better ensure rabbits are eating the oats and not non-target species
- **Move untouched dishes every 1–2 nights** & try other spots
- **After a few nights, identify your most active feeding sites**; these will be your pre-feeding sites & where you will feed the virus-treated oats on your release day

3 Pre-Feeding Phase (Min. 4 Nights Prior to Release)

- **A successful pre-feeding phase is ESSENTIAL** to the success of your release
- This phase establishes the habit of rabbits eating the same type of oats, from the same spots in which you will ultimately feed the virus-treated oats
- Rabbits MUST consistently eat pre-feed oats at the same sites for a minimum of 4 consecutive nights immediately before your release day
- **Contact GeoCatch if rabbits are not eating your pre-feed**

4 Release Night

- Collect your virus-treated oats from the GeoCatch/LBG team on your scheduled "Release Date".
- Remove **ALL** remaining pre-feed oats before putting out the virus-treated oats.
- Use **ALL** of the virus-treated oats provided to you; they will only remain viable for ~24 hours.

Rabbits impacted by Calicivirus RHDV1-K5 are found with this distinct posture.



5 After Release

- The virus takes 48–72 hours to impact an adult rabbit
- Leave any remaining virus-treated oats in feeding dishes & resume feeding untreated "pre-feed" oats for 3–4 nights in the same spots
- If you find any dead rabbits, put them inside a warren to encourage further spread of the virus
- You should see a reduction or absence of rabbits in ~ 4 weeks;

Important note

RHDV1-K5 is a species-specific virus used as a biocontrol for rabbit management. It only affects rabbits and is harmless to humans, pets, and wildlife.

K5 alone is not a silver bullet, but as the **first step** in an integrated program, it can deliver a significant knockdown that makes everything that follows far more effective.

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FAQ's

What happens if it rains?

- Heavy rain can wash the virus off of treated oats. If significant rainfall is predicted, you will be notified if the release date will be rescheduled.
- Rain may also interfere with pre-feeding as rabbits will not feed during heavy rain events. If this occurs, additional pre-feeding may be necessary to establish consistent feeding activity before release night.

Will my dog or other animals be harmed by the calicivirus release, by eating virus-treated oats or by eating a rabbit that has died from the virus?

- No. Calicivirus RHDV1-K5 (the K5 strain of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus) is a species-specific virus that infects European rabbits, including domestic rabbits.
- It does not infect humans, dogs, cats, livestock, native wildlife or other predators. These animals cannot contract the disease from eating either the virus-treated oats or infected rabbits.
- *Important: Domestic pet and commercial rabbits are susceptible to the virus. See FAQ 8 for information about protecting pet rabbits.*

What do I do if I find a dead rabbit?

- Rabbits who die from impact of Calicivirus are found in a very specific posture.
- Don't bury or bin carcasses. Rabbits that die from Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease typically are found in a very specific posture, lying on their side, with their head arched backwards and legs extended.
- Infected carcasses can contribute to the spread of the virus through contact with other rabbits and flies. If so inclined, we encourage you to relocate any found rabbit carcass that you believed succumbed to this virus to other areas where rabbits are active. Down a warren entrance is best, so foxes don't take them. Rabbits that come in contact to the carcass and flies feeding on them carry the virus to other rabbits and help it spread. Wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards.

What should I do with left over/uneaten oats?

- Top up any uneaten virus-treated oats with untreated oats and leave out. If you do not wish to do this, dispose of in your general waste.
- Consistent with our program guidance: Following release night, continue providing fresh, untreated oats at your established feeding sites for the next 3–4 nights. This encourages rabbits to continue visiting the feeding sites, increasing opportunities for contact between infected and uninfected rabbits and helping the virus spread through the local population.
- The virus remains effective for ~24 hours from the time we open the vials to mix into the oats, losing effectiveness over time, particularly when exposed to heat, sunlight and moisture.

Rabbits are not eating my pre-feed oats, what can I do?

- Experiment with other feeding site locations
- Reduce potential competing food sources: Where practical, cut lawn/grass short; trim bushes, etc to make the oats more attractive to the rabbits
- Try mixing in diced apples to your pre-feed oats
- If rabbits are still not feeding consistently, contact our team for advice

Birds are eating all my oats; what can I do?

- Put your pre-feed oats out at dusk, and either remove or cover up during the day to better ensure it's rabbits that are eating your oats rather than birds throughout the day.

How long until I see results?

- Allow approximately 4 weeks after your release to assess the results.
- Don't look for dead rabbits, as often rabbits will return to their burrows seeking comfort when feeling unwell. Rather look for the absence of or reduction in rabbit activity such as, including fresh diggings, droppings, feeding damage and sightings.
- Most rabbits that eat virus-treated oats die within a few days. However, the virus can continue spreading through the local rabbit population for up to 4 weeks after release, mainly through rabbit to rabbit contact and flies.

Can I protect my pet rabbit?

- Yes. Vaccines are available to provide protection against certain strains of the virus, including RHDV1-K5. However, other strains may also be present, and not all vaccines protect against every strain.
- Contact your veterinarian well before the scheduled release to discuss the most appropriate vaccination and booster schedule for your rabbit. Vaccination should be combined with measures to minimise exposure to wild rabbits, biting insects and potentially contaminated materials.