FROM THE CHIEF VETERINARIAN of BRITISH COLUMBIA

A week ago we confirmed that we have an outbreak of a very deadly disease in feral European rabbits in BC. It was first seen in a feral colony on the campus for VIU in Nanaimo. 2 other locations have been confirmed in that area, plus we strongly suspect a feral colony in Courtenay Comox and have confirmed it in a feral rabbit in Delta.

The biggest issue here is the threat to pets, 4H rabbits and commercial rabbit breeders. This is an easily transmitted, hard to destroy virus. The strain we have is an RHD2 but is behaving more like the lethal RHD1 with a short incubation period and very high (80-100%) mortality.

Private practitioners are working to get the vaccine in to protect the pet/commercial rabbits but it may take some time. IN the mean time we need rabbit owners to practice high biosecurity and to talk to their veterinarians about what that means and to work through them to acquire vaccinations.

Attached is some of the information we have been sharing with Rabbit Associations and did share with the CVBC.

We have also shared the following as a potential applicable tool for rabbit owners, breeders, or rabbitries. It is a biosecurity assessment tool that was developed for small-scale backyard poultry flocks to assess individual biosecurity needs - http://bcchicken.ca/news/tools-smaller-poultry-farmers-backyard-flocks/. It might also be useful for veterinarians to use to help assess facilities and build plans.

News Release from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018FLNR0014-000315 -

Jane Pritchard
Executive Director Plant and Animal Health Branch
Chief Veterinary Officer