

Free Rabbit Disease Testing Available

How do I get rabbit disease testing kits?

Disease testing kits for calicivirus (RHDV – Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus) and myxoma virus (Myxomatosis) are available from CSIRO and via RabbitScan.

Sampling kits are **different** for RHDV and myxoma virus testing, and they each have a preferred tissue to be collected; liver for RHDV, eyelids or skin lesions for myxoma virus.

Request your calicivirus and myxoma virus sampling kits online from:

- CSIRO <https://research.csiro.au/rhdv/testing/> or
- RabbitScan (<https://www.feralscan.org.au/rabbitscan/>).

Requests for bulk sampling kits can be made direct to CSIRO via email (RabbitCalicivirus@csiro.au). The kits contain 10+ sampling tubes, submission forms and sampling instructions, and can be made available to regional Landcare coordinators, biosecurity officers, vets, or relevant clubs (e.g. breeders society). Nominated individuals or groups can distribute kits to the public as needed.

How much does it cost? **Testing is free!**

How is the testing done?

Tissue samples submitted for RHDV testing should only come from found dead rabbits thought to have died of the virus, as the disease is fast acting and only likely to be found in carcasses. RHDV typically leaves rabbits with their heads tipped back but few other signs apart from, occasionally, a trickle of foamy blood from the nose.

Myxomatosis results in lesions around the eyes, nose or genitals. Myxomatosis is slower acting so euthanised rabbits with symptoms may be sampled as well as carcasses. Rabbit carcasses should be placed in a double plastic bag and stored in a freezer while waiting for a test kit.

Typical RHDV carcass



Image: Peacock D.

Typical Myxomatosis symptoms



Image: Patel K.

Testing of samples submitted via the CSIRO and RabbitScan portals is undertaken by CSIRO. Viral nucleic acids are extracted from samples and tested for the presence of specific rabbit viruses by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) which amplifies parts of the virus's genome.

RHDV testing is done in weekly batches. Myxoma virus testing is done less frequently as samples are received less regularly. Results are sent to a nominated email address or mobile number.

Free Rabbit Disease Testing Available

What are the benefits of rabbit disease testing?

Rabbits remain the major pest species affecting agriculture, ecosystems, and biodiversity in Australia – costing approximately AUD\$239 million per year to the agricultural industry and posing a risk to over 300 threatened native species of plants and animals. Virus biocontrol is highly effective in suppressing rabbit populations as part of an integrated pest management strategy.

Knowing what viruses are active where helps local land managers to plan their rabbit control program, and it is vital to understanding how biocontrols are working nationally and how improved rabbit biocontrol options may be developed. Examples of the benefits from rabbit testing follow.

1. **New Knowledge:** Monitoring the circulating rabbit viruses such as RHDV in the landscape helps us to understand how the strains are spreading and evolving. It informs rabbit control research programs to reduce the impact of rabbits on primary producers and the environment. As an example, CSIRO and the University of Adelaide are currently using tissue samples to study caliciviruses and myxoma viruses (respectively).
2. **Science Communication/Community Engagement:** A monthly map is updated showing where samples for testing have been received from (at a suburb level) and where there has been RHDV and/or myxoma virus activity <https://research.csiro.au/rhdv/category/news/>. This ongoing research is the world's longest running citizen science survey for rabbit viral disease.
3. **Awareness:** Monitoring can help landholders and biosecurity officers determine whether their local area has a current outbreak and help them to decide if, and when, they can effectively release RHDV-K5.

More information

RabbitScan: A free resource to help record sightings, map occurrence and plan and record rabbit control programs – as well as order rabbit virus testing kits. Data from RabbitScan is useful to land managers and to researchers where it not only helps to track the occurrence of rabbit viruses but can also provide valuable information about rabbit management.

<https://www.feralscan.org.au/rabbitscan/default.aspx>

Rabbit caliciviruses: Maps of positive rabbit virus testing results from preceding months are available, along with news of rabbit related research from CSIRO.

<https://research.csiro.au/rhdv/category/news/>

Useful Links:

- How do I know if a rabbit died from RHDV? https://rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/RHDV_HowToIdentifyIt_lannellaA_2023.pdf
- RHDV resources from CSIRO <https://research.csiro.au/rhdv/links/>
- RabbitScan – Handy rabbit resources https://www.feralscan.org.au/rabbitscan/pagecontent.aspx?page=rabbit_handyresources
- About Rabbits & Rabbit Control (including biocontrols) <https://rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/manage/>
- Release of K5 Biocontrol <https://pestsmart.org.au/toolkit-resource/bait-delivery-of-rabbit-haemorrhagic-disease-virus-rhdv1-k5-strain/>

Research Funding:

Funding for free testing provided by DAFF.

Funding to assist sequencing of myxoma samples provided by Rabbit-Free Australia.