

Frequently Asked Questions about the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program - 2017 ONRAB Field Trials

Q. What is the ONRAB ORV Field Trial?

A. In August 2017, Wildlife Services and cooperators will conduct U.S. field trials in 5 states with the ONRAB (Artemis Technologies, Guelph, Ontario, Canada) vaccine that is being used in Canada to control rabies in raccoons and skunks. The first U.S. field trial with ONRAB took place in West Virginia during 2011 and was expanded in 2012 to include strategic areas in Ohio, New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire. The 2017 studies will continue the work conducted in 2012-2016. The ONRAB field trial results for 2011-2017 will serve as part of the basis for potential licensure for use in the U.S. by the USDA-APHIS Center for Veterinary Biologics.

Q. What does the bait look like?

A. The ONRAB bait consists of a polyvinyl chloride (PVC) blister pack, containing the rabies vaccine. To make the bait attractive, the blister pack containing the vaccine is coated with a sweet attractant that includes vegetable-based fats, wax, icing sugar, vegetable oil, artificial marshmallow flavor, and dark-green food-grade dye.

Q. Can I get rabies from contact with the vaccine?

A. No. The vaccine does not contain the live rabies virus. It contains only a single gene that is passcoded with the outer coating of the rabies virus. The virus that carries this single gene may cause an adenovirus infection in people who are pregnant or immunosuppressed. Typically symptoms of an adenovirus include fever, sore throat, and headache (i.e., similar to a common cold). If you come into contact with the vaccine, wash the exposed area thoroughly with soap and water and contact your local public health officials.

Q. What if I find an oral rabies vaccination (ORV) bait near my home?

A. It is recommended that if bait is found it is not disturbed unless it is on your lawn, driveway, or other area where it is not likely to attract a raccoon or other wild animal. While wearing a glove or other protective covering (i.e., plastic bag), you could move bait to a wooded area where a raccoon, skunk, fox or coyote will be more likely to find it. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with a bait.

Q. Why do I need to wear a glove when handling an ORV bait?

A. An intact bait will not harm you, but the bait coating may get on your skin. If a blister pack within the bait is broken and the liquid vaccine is visible, use protective gloves or pick the bait up in a plastic bag without making contact with it. Cover the bait with 1:10 dilution of household bleach, and wipe down affected areas with bleach solution. Place cleaning materials in a bag, and dispose of the bag in regular garbage. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with bait. If you suspect you may have been exposed to the vaccine please contact your local public health officials.

Q. What if I do not have a glove?

A. You can use a plastic bag or paper towel to prevent you from coming into direct contact with the bait and vaccine. Be sure to dispose of it after use.

Q. What if my child finds an ORV bait?

A. If your child were to bring you an intact bait, you may place the bait into an area of thick cover. If your child brings you a bait that is leaking vaccine, wash the exposed skin and contact your local public health officials for further instructions and potential referral. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after contact with a bait.

Q. What if my dog or cat eats an ORV bait?

A. This vaccine has been shown to be safe in many different species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Eating a large number of baits may cause a temporarily upset stomach in your pet, but it does not pose a long-term health risk. Do not attempt to remove a bait from your pet's mouth; doing so may cause you to be bitten and could lead to vaccine exposure. If your pet becomes ill from bait consumption, please contact your veterinarian for more information.

Q. How long do ORV baits last in the environment?

A. Studies have shown that most baits are eaten within 4 days, and almost all baits are gone in 1 week. If baits are not found and eaten, they will dissolve and expose the vaccine. Sunlight and exposure to air inactivates the vaccine.

Q. How does a raccoon, skunk, fox or coyote get vaccinated by eating the ORV bait?

A. The vaccine is contained inside a blister packet, which is made attractive to wildlife with a sweet attractant. When an animal bites into the bait it punctures the blister pack and the vaccine bathes the oral cavity and tonsils areas resulting in an oral vaccination against rabies. The animal's immune system is exposed to the part of the rabies virus that causes an immune response and production of antibodies against rabies, and cannot cause rabies. The blueprint for making antibodies to neutralize the rabies virus is stored in the animal's immune system, allowing it to respond quickly if it is later exposed to a rabid animal.

Q. How long does the vaccine last?

A. Research suggests this vaccine should be effective for more than a year; however, it is difficult to determine how immune systems in individual animals will respond to the vaccine.

Q. How do you distribute ORV baits in cities and suburban areas?

A. Working with employees from cooperating agencies, WS distributes baits in urban and suburban areas by vehicle. This is the most effective approach for distributing the bait and minimizing human contact with baits.

Q. How else does WS distribute ORV baits?

A. In rural or open areas, WS distributes baits using aircraft. Depending on the distribution area and availability of aircraft, a helicopter or fixed wing aircraft may be used.

Q. How can I find out more information about this program?

A. You can dial 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) to speak with staff from Wildlife Services or visit the web: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/rabies>