

Ohio Department of Health

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N E W S

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For immediate release – April 28, 2008

RACCOON RABIES VACCINATION BAITING SLATED FOR MAY 1 TO MAY 23

Operations May be Extended due to Weather

COLUMBUS – A spring oral rabies vaccination operation, coordinated by the Ohio departments of Health (ODH), Natural Resources and Transportation, plus the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services program, will begin May 1 in five northeast Ohio counties.

Baits containing a vaccine, that when eaten by a raccoon protects it against rabies, will be distributed by vehicle, aircraft and helicopter in target areas of northern Ohio. This is to curb the spread of raccoon-rabies variant (RRV) that was identified in Cuyahoga, Geauga and Lake counties in 2004. In 2007, 19 rabid animals (10 raccoons and nine skunks) were confirmed positive from Cuyahoga, Lake and Geauga counties for RRV, up from 10 rabid raccoons identified from the same area in 2006.

“ODH and its partners remain committed to containing raccoon-rabies variant in Ohio,” said ODH Director Alvin Jackson, M.D. “Local, state and federal agencies working together make this goal possible.”

Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) will be distributed in a roughly 1,121-square-mile area in all of Lake and Geauga counties; north of Interstate 80 in Portage County; east of Interstate 77 in Cuyahoga County; and northern Summit County. Most vaccine-laden baits, particularly in rural areas, will be distributed by air, with the use of a specially equipped white Beechcraft King Air airplane and by helicopter. In urban and residential areas, teams in trucks will distribute vaccine-laden baits.

“Residents in the areas to be baited should be aware of low-flying aircraft and should keep children and pets away from the baits, so raccoons have every chance to eat them,” Jackson said.

Two types of bait will be used. Aircraft will drop a small plastic sachet, about the size of a ketchup packet. In urban areas, the vaccine will be inside a hard, brown 2-x-2-inch fishmeal block. About 367,200 baits will be distributed.

Weather permitting, the operation will start Thursday, May 1 and continue through May 23. Ground baiting may be extended, depending on the weather.

The operation is part of the Appalachian Ridge ORV program, which has been conducted in Ohio and other states since 1997. By vaccinating raccoons along Ohio’s eastern border, an immune barrier has been created that has successfully slowed the spread of RRV into Ohio from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The fall 2007 ORV baiting is slated for late August.

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ODH Rabies Baiting

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Residents should avoid the baits and keep pets confined during the baiting period. Dogs in particular are attracted to the baits and will occasionally eat them. The baits are not harmful to pets. Please keep the following information in mind:

- Know what the baits look like. The coated sachet, which will be distributed by aircraft, is about the size of a ketchup packet. It is white and rolled in a brown fishmeal glaze. In urban areas, where baits will be distributed by vehicle, the sachet will be inside a hard, brown fishmeal block, about 2-x-2-inch square.
- Instruct children to leave the baits alone.
- Once your area is baited, keep dogs and cats inside or on leashes for up to five days. Most baits disappear within 24 hours; however, it is important raccoons have every opportunity to eat them.
- Do not attempt to take bait away from your pet; you may be bitten.
- Anyone handling baits should wear gloves. If baits are found in areas frequented by pets or children, toss them into deeper cover. Damaged baits can be disposed of in the trash.
- If a person is exposed to the vaccine (red liquid), thoroughly wash any areas of the skin that came into contact with the vaccine with soap and water.
- If someone has been exposed to the vaccine or has questions about the baiting, call the local health department or ODH's information line at 1-888-722-4371.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects animals and people. The variant of rabies associated with raccoons is of particular public health concern because it can affect other wild animals and pets. The virus is found in the saliva of affected animals, most often raccoons, skunks and bats, and is spread by a bite or scratch. Bats, raccoons and skunks pose the greatest risk of rabies in Ohio. To protect your family against this still-deadly disease:

- Avoid contact with wild animals and animals you do not know.
- Vaccinate your pets against rabies and keep them current on their shots.
- If bitten, call your doctor. If your pet has contact with a wild animal, call your veterinarian. Rabies exposures should also be reported to your local health department.

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Contact: Ohio Department of Health – Office of Public Affairs (614) 644-8562

Editors: Please note the following from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources:

“According to Ohio Administrative Code 1501:31-15-03, it is illegal to live trap, move and release raccoons. Persons dealing with a nuisance raccoon cannot relocate the animal. There are only two legal options for nuisance raccoons; euthanize or release on the same property where they were live trapped. Uninformed people who are relocating nuisance raccoons may be contributing to rabies crossing the barrier.”