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NEWS

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Office of Public Affairs • (614) 644-8562
Jay Carey, Director

RACCOON RABIES VACCINATION BAITING SCHEDULED FOR TODAY

COLUMBUS – Supplemental oral raccoon rabies vaccinations, coordinated by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services program, began today in three northeast Ohio counties following confirmation of rabies-carrying raccoons in Lake and Geauga counties.

Since the initial confirmation in late July of a rabid raccoon in Lake County, four additional rabid raccoons have been identified. All five were located west of an immune barrier that since 1997 has successfully stopped further spread of rabies. It is unknown if these breeches occurred through natural raccoon movement or intentional or unintentional relocation.

“Breeches in the barrier were anticipated and contingency plans have gone into effect,” said ODH Director J. Nick Baird, M.D. “Surveillance for sick raccoons is underway in the three counties and we are moving quickly to immunize as many raccoons as possible to stop any further transmission.”

Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) will be distributed in a roughly 20-square mile radius around where the raccoons were found. This includes all of Lake and Geauga counties and eastern portions of Cuyahoga County. Most of the baits will be distributed by air, with the use of two specially equipped Beechcraft airplanes. In urban and residential areas, vaccine-laden baits will be distributed by ground teams in trucks.

“A swift response of this scope requires a team effort,” Baird said. “There has been tremendous cooperation among local health districts, and state and federal agencies.”

Weather permitting, the operation will conclude today.

The operation is similar to the Appalachian Ridge Oral Rabies Vaccination (ORV) Program baiting, which has been conducted in Ohio and other states since 1997. The 2004 ORV Program will take place, as scheduled, in early September.

Residents are reminded to leave baits alone and to 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:

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ODH Rabies Baiting

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- Know what the baits look like. One is 1.25 x 1.25 x .75 inches in size, brown and square in shape. The vaccine packet is incased in a hard fishmeal polymer shell. The other bait is a plastic packet, coated with fishmeal and oil, with vaccine inside. Both will be used for this operation.
- 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 the baits.
- 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, call the local health department or ODH's information line at 1-888-RABIES-1.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects animals and people. The strain 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. Ohio had 53 rabies cases in 2003, including three raccoons in Mahoning and Trumbull counties.

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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."