

Contact:
Tanya Espinosa, 301/851-4092
Jordona Kirby, 865/363-9381

MEDIA ADVISORY: USDA conducts fall vaccine drop in response to rabies cases

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services, in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Health, will begin distributing vaccine baits in parts of Trumbull and Mahoning Counties, Ohio starting October 12. USDA continues to seek the public's help as it works to determine the frequency of rabies in eastern Ohio raccoons. Anyone who encounters a raccoon that is sick-acting or behaving unusually is asked to report the animal.

During September 2021, the City of Warren reported two rabies-positive raccoons. As a result, increased surveillance and continued baiting in Trumbull and Mahoning Counties are underway. The baiting will use an oral rabies vaccine (ORV) bait, called RABORAL V-RG®, which consists of a small bait packet filled with the vaccine and coated with fishmeal. The baits may be distributed by helicopter or by vehicles within the City limits.

This ORV bait has been shown to be safe in many species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Humans and pets cannot get rabies from contact with the baits but are asked to leave them undisturbed should they encounter them. If contact with baits occurs, immediately rinse the contact area with warm water and soap. For photos of the ORV project, visit:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/sets/72157623983143606/>

The targeted ORV bait distribution will begin around October 12 and continue for approximately one week. Residents of the City of Warren and surrounding communities may see a low-flying aircraft (helicopter) dropping the baits and may observe ground baiting teams in vehicles distributing the baits by hand. This effort will distribute approximately 39,600 ORV baits by helicopter and 5,400 ORV baits by hand.

The public in these areas is asked to report any dead raccoons, including those struck by vehicles, or live raccoons acting in an unusual way. While seeing raccoons during the day in towns and suburbs is not unusual, any raccoon that appears to be friendly, unafraid, or sick (staggering, unsteady or aggressive) should be reported to 330-726-3386 or to your local county health department. USDA biologists or specialists will respond and remove the animal or carcass to test it for rabies.

Signs suggestive of rabies include unusual, aggressive, calm, and "friendly" behavior, an inability to eat or drink, balance problems, circling, seizures, coma and finally death.

While rabies is fatal, it is also 100% preventable. Rabies is caused by a virus that infects the central nervous system in mammals and represents a serious public health concern. Human exposures can be successfully remedied if medical attention is sought immediately following exposure. If exposures to the virus are not treated it is almost always fatal. Costs associated with detection, prevention and control of rabies exceed \$500 million annually in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 90 percent of reported rabies cases in the U.S. are in wildlife. People are urged not to contact or feed wildlife and to keep their pets' rabies vaccinations current.

As part of the USDA National Rabies Management Program, oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits have been distributed in Ohio through aerial drops and by hand since 1997 in partnership with state and local public health agencies and others. This effort seeks to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies by creating a barrier along the Appalachian Mountains from the Canadian border to Alabama.

For more information about the National Rabies Management Program, visit:
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/programs/nrmp>



Photo of RABORAL V-RG® baits. Left: Coated sachet packets used for helicopter baiting. Right: Fishmeal polymer baits used for ground/vehicle baiting.

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