



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Oral rabies vaccine bait distribution planned for early November in northeast Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For the second consecutive year the Alabama Department of Public Health will participate in a federally funded project to help stop the spread of raccoon rabies. Beginning Nov. 5 baits will be dropped by low-flying airplanes and distributed by hand in the same five-county area of northeast Alabama as they were last November.

"Raccoons accounted for 32 of the 66 cases of animal rabies confirmed in Alabama in 2003," said Dr. John Kelliher, associate state public health veterinarian. "But no cases of raccoon-rabies variant have been detected in the counties involved since the bait distribution last year. When raccoons consume vaccine-laced baits they become protected against rabies."

Rabies is a virus that attacks the brain and causes a fatal disease. Symptoms of rabies include unusual behavior, an inability to eat or drink, balance problems, circling, seizures, coma and ultimately death.

The baits will be distributed in portions of Cherokee, Etowah, Jackson and Marshall counties and throughout DeKalb County. The bait density is expected to average one bait over an area the size of two to four football fields.

Other cooperating agencies in the multi-state effort are the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries; Georgia and Tennessee authorities; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The baits consist of a small vaccine packet placed inside a fishmeal block which is tasty to raccoons. People and pets cannot get rabies from coming into contact with the baits and are asked to leave the bait cubes undisturbed. However, intact baits can be moved if found where children and pets play.

Damaged baits should be placed in a bag and discarded in the trash. Wear gloves or use a paper towel when picking up a bait. Then throw the intact bait into a fence row, wood lot, ditch or other raccoon habitat area. Finally, wash hands after any skin contact with damaged bait.

If a pet eats a bait, do not take it away since doing so might result in your being bitten. Consuming a few baits is not harmful to pets, although vomiting or diarrhea can result if a pet eats a lot of them. Owners may wish to confine their pets for a couple of days and then check the area for more baits.

By vaccinating raccoons against rabies, the number of animals that can serve as reservoirs of the disease and infect other wildlife, domestic animals or humans will be significantly reduced.

The bait distribution process is expected to last two weeks, weather permitting. If you have questions about a bait you have found, call the toll-free number found on the bait itself or 1-800-677-0939. For additional information concerning the oral rabies vaccine program, please contact USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services program toll-free at 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

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