



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Oral rabies vaccine drop planned for central Alabama in early April

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health is participating in a federally funded project in central Alabama in collaboration with other state and federal agencies to help stop the westward movement of raccoon rabies by orally vaccinating wild raccoons.

The department is working in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services; the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to distribute baits that vaccinate wild raccoons against rabies. The distribution effort is set to start Monday, April 5 and will continue for about two weeks. This is the second oral rabies vaccine drop effort in Alabama. The first was in northeast Alabama last November.

Small vaccine packets are placed inside a fishmeal block which is tasty to raccoons. These baits will be dropped from low-flying airplanes or distributed by local teams on foot or in vehicles. Baits will be distributed throughout Autauga County and in portions of Chilton, Dallas, Elmore and Lowndes counties.

Air distribution will be coordinated from Craig Field Airport in Selma. Ground distribution will occur primarily in the immediate vicinity of Autaugaville, Billingsley, Clanton, Coosada, Deatsville, Elmore, Maplesville, Millbrook, Prattville and Thorsby. The oral rabies vaccines will only be distributed along the Alabama River in Lowndes County.

"Our goal is to halt the spread of the raccoon rabies variant in Alabama," said Dr. John Kelliher, associate state public health veterinarian. "Raccoons that eat the vaccine-laced bait become immune to rabies. Our first oral rabies vaccine campaign program went very smoothly in northeast Alabama, and was well received by the local residents."

Rabies is a virus that attacks the brain and causes a fatal disease in raccoons. Symptoms of rabies include unusual behavior, an inability to eat or drink, balance problems, circling, seizures, coma and finally death. Of the 66 cases of rabies confirmed in animals in Alabama during 2003, 32 were in raccoons.

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.

People and pets cannot get rabies from coming into contact with the baits and persons are asked to leave the bait cubes undisturbed if they encounter them. However, if a bait is intact it can be moved if it is found where children and pets play. Persons are advised to wear gloves or use a paper towel when picking up a bait. Then they are to toss the intact bait into a fence row, wood lot, ditch or other raccoon habitat area. Damaged baits should be placed in a bag and discarded in the trash. Persons are advised to wear gloves or use a paper towel when picking up a bait. Finally, wash hands after any skin contact with a damaged bait.

If a pet eats a bait, do not take it away. Consuming a few baits is not harmful to pets, although vomiting or diarrhea can result if a pet eats a lot of them. Pet owners may wish to confine their pets for a couple of days and then check the area for more baits.

The public is urged never to feed or relocate wildlife and to vaccinate dogs and cats annually as required by Alabama law. USDA currently works with 15 states to distribute oral rabies vaccine baits. The vaccine baits are registered for use by agency officials only, and baits are not available for sale to the general public.

If you have questions about a bait you have found, please call the toll-free number found on the bait itself or 1-800-677-0939.

3/19/04