



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Central Alabama oral rabies vaccine distribution begins

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: John C. Kelliher, D.V.M.

(334) 206-5969

jkelliher@adph.state.al.us

Distribution of oral rabies vaccine baits begins Monday throughout Autauga County and in portions of Chilton, Dallas, Elmore and Lowndes counties. Baits will be dropped from a low-flying airplane and distributed by hand. The Alabama Department of Public Health is a cooperator in this federally funded project intended to help stop the westward movement of raccoon rabies by orally vaccinating wild raccoons.

Vaccine drops have been used successfully since 1989 in the U.S. and Canada with approximately 40 million baits distributed without any major problems. The United States Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services; the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries; the Alabama Department of Public Health; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are cooperators in this project. U.S.D.A. currently works with 15 states to distribute oral rabies vaccine baits. The bait distribution will take two weeks, weather permitting.

"Our goal is to halt the spread of the raccoon rabies variant," said Dr. John Kelliher, associate state public health veterinarian. "Vaccine-laced baits are protective against rabies when raccoons eat them. The bait density is expected to average one bait over an area the size of two to four football fields."

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

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 baits consist of small vaccine packets placed inside fishmeal blocks which are tasty to raccoons. People and pets cannot get rabies from coming into contact with the baits, and people 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.

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. 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 baits.

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. Pet owners may wish to confine their pets for a couple of days and then check the area for more baits.

Persons having questions about a bait they have found should call the toll-free number found on the bait itself or 1-800-677-0939.

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