



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Second central Alabama oral rabies vaccine distribution to begin March 1

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Distribution of oral rabies vaccine baits begins March 1 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 cooperater 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. This is the second year that the bait distribution has been conducted in these Alabama counties. Last year the baits were distributed during April.

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 cooperaters in this project. U.S.D.A. currently works with 15 states to distribute oral rabies vaccine baits. The bait distribution will take one to 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."

In Alabama, raccoons are the animals most likely infected with rabies. 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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