



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

Oral rabies vaccine shows success in preventing rabies in raccoons

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: John C. Kelliher, DVM
(334) 206-5969

As distribution of oral rabies vaccine baits begins this week in central Alabama, agencies involved are pleased that no new raccoon rabies cases have been reported in the areas in which the vaccines were distributed last spring.

"We have not detected any new raccoon rabies cases in the portion of the counties where the vaccines have been distributed, including Autauga, Dallas, Elmore and Chilton counties," said Frank Boyd of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's wildlife services program in Auburn.

Last April baits were dropped from a low-flying airplane and distributed by hand throughout Autauga County and in portions of Chilton, Dallas, Elmore and Lowndes counties. This federally funded project is intended to help stop the westward movement of raccoon rabies by orally vaccinating wild raccoons.

"Vaccination of raccoons can help prevent the spread of raccoon rabies into west Alabama, where it currently is not known to occur," stated Agriculture and Industries Commissioner Ron Sparks. "I am proud that the department can be a part of such a proactive measure as the rabies vaccine bait drop to protect our families and livestock."

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 U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's wildlife services program; 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. The bait distribution will take one to two weeks, weather permitting.

"Our goal remains 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. Of the 66 cases of rabies reported in Alabama during 2004, raccoons accounted for 35 of the positive cases. 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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