



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama oral rabies vaccine distribution to begin Oct. 21

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Distribution of oral rabies vaccine baits begins Oct. 21 in two different bait drop zones in portions of 11 Alabama counties. Baits will be dropped from a low-flying aircraft in forested and rural regions and distributed by hand in populated areas.

The distribution will begin in northeast Alabama in Cherokee, DeKalb, Etowah, Jackson and Marshall counties, followed by a bait drops in Bibb, Chilton, Jefferson, Perry, Shelby and Tuscaloosa counties. This federally funded project is intended to halt the westward movement of rabies by orally vaccinating raccoons.

Vaccine drops have been used successfully in Alabama since November 2003. Since 1989 more than 40 million baits have been distributed in the U.S. and Canada 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 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. Mel Stephens, 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 four to five football fields."

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

Two types of vaccine packets will be used, both of which are tasty to raccoons. The "coated sachet" baits resemble a mayonnaise packet coated in fish oil and fish meal. The fishmeal polymer bait looks like a mayonnaise packet folded inside a fishy smelling, plastic cube which is about the size of an ice cube.

People and pets cannot get rabies from coming into contact with the baits, and the public is 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. To relocate an intact bait throw it into a fence row, wooded 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 when picking up a bait and to wash their hands after any contact with damaged baits.

If a pet eats a bait, do not risk being bitten by taking it away. Consuming a few baits is not harmful to pets, although vomiting or diarrhea can result if a pet eats several of them. Pet owners are advised to confine their pets for a couple of days and check the area for more baits.

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

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