



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Alabama oral rabies vaccine distribution to begin in Central Alabama**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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A federally funded project to halt the westward movement of rabies by orally vaccinating raccoons will begin distributing oral rabies vaccine baits in early April in Central Alabama. Baits will be dropped from a low-flying aircraft in forested and rural regions and distributed by hand in populated areas.

The distribution will take place in parts of Bibb, Chilton, Jefferson, Perry, Shelby and Tuscaloosa counties. Baits will be distributed by hand in the majority of Jefferson County, including the city of Birmingham, and in the populated areas south of Interstate 459 and west of Interstate 65 including Alabaster, Helena, Pelham, parts of Bessemer and McCalla. The entire project is expected to take about two weeks, weather permitting.

Vaccine drops have been used successfully in Alabama since November 2003. Since 1989 millions of 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 Jefferson County Department of Health, 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.

"Our goal remains stopping 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 public should never feed raccoons because this encourages the raccoons to come into closer contact with pets and people. Dogs and cats in Alabama are required to be immunized for rabies annually."

The bait density is expected to average one bait over an area the size of about five football fields. The vaccination target zone is about 2,500 square miles. In Alabama, raccoons are the animals most likely to be 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 packet baits will be used, both of which are tasty to raccoons. The first type is a "coated sachet" bait that resembles a ketchup packet covered in a brown fishmeal. The

second type of bait is a "fishmeal polymer" bait which is about the size of an ice cube. Both types of baits are labeled "RABIES VACCINE; DO NOT DISTURB." A toll-free information number is also found on the baits.

Baits are not available for general public use and cannot be purchased. If someone lives within the vaccine zone, baiting will be conducted at the recommended rate in raccoon habitat around the areas where people live, so there would be no need for them to call to request extra baits. Please do not call to request extra baits.

People and pets cannot get rabies from coming into contact with the baits, and the public is asked to leave the baits 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 fencerow, 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 baits or 1-800-677-0939.

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