



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Project seeks to stop the spread of raccoon rabies in Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health is participating in a federally funded project in northeast Alabama to help stop the westward movement of raccoon rabies by orally vaccinating wild raccoons.

The department is working in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services; the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries; Georgia and Tennessee officials; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to distribute baits that vaccinate wild raccoons against rabies. The effort starts Friday, Nov. 14, and continues for two to three weeks. It is anticipated that follow-up vaccine efforts will be repeated next year.

Small vaccine packets are placed inside a fishmeal block which is tasty to raccoons. These baits will be dropped from low-flying airplanes or distributed by local teams on foot or in vehicles. Baits will be distributed in portions of Cherokee, DeKalb, Etowah, Jackson and Marshall counties.

"Our goal is to halt the spread of the raccoon rabies variant in Alabama," said Dr. John Kelliher, associate state public health veterinarian. "Raccoons that eat the vaccine-laced bait become immune to rabies."

Rabies is a virus that attacks the brain and causes a fatal disease in raccoons. Symptoms of rabies 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.

People and pets cannot get rabies from coming into contact with the baits and 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 toss the intact bait into a fence row, wood lot, ditch or other raccoon habitat area. Finally, wash hands after any skin contact with damaged bait.

If a pet eats a bait, do not take it away. 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.

The bait distribution process is expected to end in late November. USDA currently works with 15 states to distribute oral rabies vaccine baits.

If you have questions about a bait you have found, call the toll-free number found on the bait itself or 1-800-677-0939.

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