



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Agencies to vaccinate raccoons in northeast and north central Alabama Oct. 5-15

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In an effort to control the spread of raccoon rabies in a large geographical area of northeast and north Central Alabama, the Alabama Department of Public Health is partnering with the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services Division (USDA WS) to vaccinate raccoons using an oral rabies vaccine (ORV). Between Oct. 5 and 15, select areas of the following counties will be involved: Blount, Cherokee, Cullman, DeKalb, Etowah, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, Marshall and Morgan.

During the 10-day period, the majority of the ORV packets will be dropped in sparsely populated areas using airplanes and helicopters. However, some areas such as Collinsville, Fort Payne, Gadsden, Henager, Leesburg, Sylvania, and a small portion of Huntsville will also have ORV packets distributed by trucks and personnel on foot.

The focus of rabies control in raccoons in Alabama is a continuation of a national program that has taken place for over a decade and includes 16 states. The efforts being undertaken for raccoons are important to public health because they reduce the risk of rabies to people and to their pets. According to Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health veterinarian, "It is important to not only let people know the beneficial aspects of the vaccine efforts, but to let them know ahead of time there is going to be ORV in the area. We don't want people to be shocked to find a vaccine packet and let anxiety undermine the overall cause."

The vaccine is intentionally being placed in raccoon habitat, but it is common for raccoon habitat to be very near residential areas. Occasionally, a vaccine may end up in unintended locations, such as in yards or driveways, either by inadvertent placement by aircraft or by pets finding and moving the vaccine.

ORV consists of a rabies vaccine and an additional carrier inside of a plastic sachet. The sachet, or packet, is coated with bait such as fishmeal crumbs, which gives it a foul odor that helps attract raccoons. Another variation of the vaccine uses a hard outer covering of bait over the sachet. Regardless of the type of bait used, raccoons are exposed to the vaccine after they eat the bait and puncture the plastic packet.

Exposure to the rabies vaccine portion of the packet will not cause a rabies infection. The most common adverse reaction to touching a vaccine packet is an allergic reaction to the fishmeal on the covering of the packet. Persons that are pregnant, immune compromised, or have direct contact with a punctured vaccine packet should consult with their physician.

The following recommendations should be followed if a person or a pet finds a vaccine packet.

- Avoid direct skin contact by always wearing gloves or using a plastic bag to remove or relocate the vaccine packet.
- A found, still intact vaccine packet can be moved to the woods where a raccoon may find it or it may be disposed of in the trash if pets are likely to contact it again. If the plastic cover is opened or punctured, the packet should be thrown in the trash using gloves.
- If the ORV is in a pet's mouth, it is not recommended to remove it because of the risk of injury from a bite and to avoid potential bare-skin contact with the vaccine.
- The vaccine is generally not harmful to pets and only very rarely requires any veterinary medical attention. There is no risk of pets contracting rabies from the vaccine, but mild gastrointestinal upset is the most common occurrence after eating the vaccine packets. Oral lesions are possible, but are much less common. Consultation with a veterinarian is recommended for any persistent clinical signs after exposure to the vaccine packets.

For questions about human or animal reactions from accidental exposure to vaccine carriers, please contact the Alabama Department of Public Health at 1-800-338-8374. For more information about the National Rabies Management program, please contact USDA WS at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

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