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# N E W S

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Office of Public Affairs • (614) 644-8562  
Jay Carey, Director

## **RACCOON RABIES VACCINATION BAITING SLATED FOR TUESDAY**

*Operations May be Extended due to Weather*

COLUMBUS – A spring oral rabies vaccination operation, coordinated by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services program, will begin Tuesday in five northeast Ohio counties.

Spring and fall vaccine baiting operations are intended to help curb the spread of raccoon rabies identified in July 2004 in Lake, Geauga and Cuyahoga counties, west of an immune barrier established by regular rabies vaccination that began in 1997. This immune barrier has successfully slowed the further spread of rabies into Ohio from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. In 2005, 34 rabid raccoons were confirmed positive for raccoon-strain rabies (RSR). To date in 2006, two RSR-positive raccoons have been identified; one each from Geauga and Lake counties.

“Supplemental, spring baiting is essential to control raccoon-strain rabies in Ohio,” said ODH Director J. Nick Baird, M.D. “Coupled with fall baiting, this operation will protect wildlife, domestic animals and Ohio residents from this still mostly fatal disease.”

Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) will be distributed in a roughly 1,149-square-mile area in all of Lake and Geauga counties; north of Interstate 80 in Portage County; east of Interstate 77 in Cuyahoga County; and northern Summit County. Most vaccine-laden baits, particularly in rural areas, will be distributed by air, with the use of a specially equipped, yellow Twin Otter airplane; the Wolf Aviation Fund provided a grant for aviation and bait costs. In urban and residential areas, teams in trucks will distribute vaccine-laden baits.

Two types of bait will be used. Airplanes will drop a small plastic sachet, about the size of a ketchup packet. In urban areas, the vaccine will be inside a hard, brown 2-x-2-inch fishmeal block. About 242,000 vaccine-laden baits will be distributed.

Weather permitting, the operation will start Tuesday, April 18, and continue through April 28. Ground baiting may be extended, depending on the weather.

The operation is similar to the Appalachian Ridge ORV Program baiting, which has been conducted in Ohio and other states since 1997. The 2006 ORV Program is slated for early September.

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## **ODH Rabies Baiting**

Page 2 of 2

Residents should avoid the baits and keep pets confined during the baiting period. Dogs in particular are attracted to the baits and will occasionally eat them. The baits are not harmful to pets. Please keep the following information in mind:

- Know what the baits look like. The coated sachet, which will be distributed by airplanes, is about the size of a ketchup packet. It is white and rolled in a brown fishmeal glaze. In urban areas, where baits will be distributed by vehicle, the sachet will be inside a hard, brown fishmeal block, about 2-x-2-inch square.
- Instruct children to leave the baits alone.
- Once your area is baited, keep dogs and cats inside or on leashes for up to five days. Most baits disappear within 24 hours; however, it is important raccoons have every opportunity to eat them.
- Do not attempt to take bait away from your pet; you may be bitten.
- Anyone handling baits should wear gloves. If baits are found in areas frequented by pets or children, toss them into deeper cover. Damaged baits can be disposed of in the trash.
- If a person is exposed to the vaccine (red liquid), thoroughly wash any areas of the skin that came into contact with the vaccine with soap and water.
- If someone has been exposed to the vaccine or has questions about the baiting, call the local health department or ODH's information line at 1-888-RABIES-1.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects animals and people. The strain of rabies associated with raccoons is of particular public health concern because it can affect other wild animals and pets. The virus is found in the saliva of affected animals, most often raccoons, skunks and bats and is spread by a bite or scratch. Bats, raccoons and skunks pose the greatest risk of rabies in Ohio. To protect your family against this still-deadly disease:

- Avoid contact with wild animals and animals you do not know.
- Vaccinate your pets against rabies and keep them current on their shots.
- If bitten, call your doctor. If your pet has contact with a wild animal, call your veterinarian. Rabies exposures should also be reported to your local health department.

-30-

**Contact: Ohio Department of Health – Office of Public Affairs (614) 644-8562**

**Editors: Please note the following from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources:**

“According to Ohio Administrative Code 1501:31-15-03, it is illegal to live trap, move and release raccoons. Persons dealing with a nuisance raccoon cannot relocate the animal. There are only two legal options for nuisance raccoons; euthanize or release on the same property where they were live trapped. Uninformed people who are relocating nuisance raccoons may be contributing to rabies crossing the barrier.”