



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs
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USDA DISTRIBUTES ORAL RABIES VACCINE ON CAPE COD, MASS.

WASHINGTON, April 27, 2009--Wildlife Services (WS), a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, will distribute oral rabies vaccine baits beginning on or about April 27 to reduce the incidence of raccoon rabies on Cape Cod, Mass., as part of ongoing cooperative rabies control efforts aimed at raccoon rabies elimination.

In cooperation with the Cape Cod Rabies Task Force, 37,000 oral rabies vaccination (ORV) baits targeting raccoons will be distributed by several methods over a 190 square mile area. Personnel from WS and the Cape Cod Rabies Task Force, along with volunteers, will be hand baiting populated areas by vehicle and a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter will assist with the distribution of ORV baits over national seashore areas. In addition, up to 100 bait stations (a distribution mechanism for ORV baits) will be positioned strategically where raccoons are likely to travel.

Since 2004, WS has been working to eliminate raccoon rabies from Cape Cod because the virus is a threat to wildlife populations, pets and public health and safety. Since Cape Cod is a peninsula, it is an ideal landscape for testing raccoon rabies elimination strategies. In 2006, Cape Cod reported 50 rabies cases, while in 2008, that number decreased to 11 reported cases.

ORV baits are coated with a fishmeal attractant and may be packaged in one-inch square cubes or two-inch plastic sachets. Humans and pets cannot get rabies from contact with the baits, but are asked to leave them undisturbed should they encounter them. This vaccine has been shown to be safe in more than 60 different species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Dogs that consume large numbers of baits may experience an upset stomach, but there are no long-term health risks.

Most sightings of rabid raccoons occur during the spring and summer when people are more likely to come into contact with wildlife. Raccoon rabies is caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system in mammals. Symptoms include unusual, aggressive or calm and "friendly" behavior, an inability to eat or drink, balance problems, circling, seizures, coma and finally death. While rabies is fatal, human exposures can be successfully treated, if treatment is sought immediately following a bite.

Since 1997, WS has been working to establish a rabies-free barrier in the eastern United States where the raccoon variant of rabies is known to exist. In addition to this work in Massachusetts, WS has coordinated cooperative rabies control efforts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia.

For additional information concerning the raccoon oral rabies vaccine program, please visit http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/rabies.shtml or contact WS toll free at 1-866-4-USA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

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