



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 IN ARIZONA

WASHINGTON, July 21, 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 July 21 in the Flagstaff area to reduce the incidence of rabies in gray fox.

In cooperation with the Coconino County Health Department, 130,000 oral rabies vaccination (ORV) baits targeting gray fox will be distributed over a 1,400 square mile area. Personnel from WS, the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Coconino County Health Department will be hand baiting populated areas by vehicle. An airplane will distribute ORV baits over rural areas.

This is the first year WS is distributing ORV baits in Arizona. The goal is to vaccinate gray fox in the area so they do not continue to spread the deadly virus. In late 2008, bat rabies variant appeared in 20 gray foxes, 6 striped skunks and 1 ringtail. Since ORV has been shown to be effective in reducing the prevalence of rabies in gray fox in Texas, WS will use it as the primary method to control this most recent outbreak in Arizona.

ORV baits contain rabies vaccine in two-inch plastic sachets coated with a fishmeal attractant. Humans and pets cannot get rabies from contact with the baits, but the public is 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.

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. Although rabies is fatal, human exposures can be successfully treated, if treatment is sought immediately following a bite.

Since 1997, WS has been working to vaccinate coyotes and gray fox in Texas. Since 2004, Texas has not detected any positive cases of canine rabies in coyotes, while the gray fox variant has declined from 101 cases in 1996 to 11 in 2008.

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

Note to Reporters: USDA news releases, program announcements and media advisories are available on the Internet. Go to the APHIS news release page at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom>. Also, anyone with an e-mail address can sign up to receive APHIS press releases automatically. Send an e-mail message to lyris@mdrdlyriss10.aphis.usda.gov and leave the subject blank. In the message, type `subscribe press_releases`.