



NEWS RELEASE
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104
Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5520

www.adph.org

Agencies vaccinate raccoons in northeast Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Dee W. Jones, D.V.M.
(334) 206-5969

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) is assisting the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services Division (USDA WS) in an effort to reduce raccoon rabies in northeast Alabama.

The USDA WS is distributing an oral rabies vaccine (ORV) that is specifically approved for use in raccoons. The ORV is being dropped from airplanes, trucks, and occasionally by hand over a large area of Jackson and Madison counties including areas near Huntsville. The project is part of the National Rabies Management Program which is currently targeting rabies reduction in wildlife in 16 states.

The USDA WS has routinely used the vaccine in some areas of Alabama for over a decade. The raccoons in the area near the border of DeKalb and Jackson counties have been vaccinated annually to stop the westward advancement of rabies in the raccoon population. However, several positive raccoons to the west of the previous vaccination sites have prompted USDA WS to shift ORV efforts westward.

According to Dr. Dee W. Jones, State Public Health Veterinarian, "We expect that using ORV in a new area will be concerning to some people that don't necessarily know the history of the program." Dr. Jones stated that the program is beneficial because it reduces the public health threat of rabies transmission to people and their pets from raccoons.

An oral rabies vaccine consists of a rabies vaccine and an additional carrier virus 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 attracts 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.

The vaccine is being placed in wooded areas to increase the exposure to raccoons, but exact placement is very difficult, especially when they are being dropped from airplanes. Occasionally, a vaccine may end up unintended locations, such as in yards or driveways, or pets may find a vaccine and bring it out of the woods.

If the vaccine is intact, gloves should be worn and the vaccine should be placed in the woods where a raccoon would likely find it. Alternatively, it can be thrown in the trash if residents have pets likely to find it before a raccoon does. Wearing gloves or wrapping a plastic bag around

hands is important to prevent direct skin contact with the bait. If the plastic cover of the ORV is opened, the vaccine should be thrown in the trash using gloves.

The vaccine packet will not cause rabies because the rabies portion of the vaccine is a killed virus, meaning it will not cause rabies. However, unlikely allergic reactions to the fishmeal bait or to the vaccine carrier in the vaccine packet have occasionally occurred in the past. People who are pregnant, immune compromised, or have direct contact with the inside of the vaccine packet should consult with their physician.

If the vaccine is in a pet's mouth, it is not recommended to remove it because of the risk of injury from a bite and probable skin contact with the vaccine. The vaccine is not harmful to pets, but may cause temporary vomiting or diarrhea. There is no risk of pets contracting rabies from the vaccine, however, people need to avoid contact with the animal's saliva for 24 hours. In the rare circumstance of a pet becoming ill or developing oral lesions, consult with your veterinarian.

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

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