

**Ohio Department of Health**

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*Ted Strickland, Governor*  
*Alvin D. Jackson, M.D., Director*



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**Office of Public Affairs**  
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For immediate release – May 7, 2009    **DRAFT**

**RACCOON RABIES VACCINATION BAITING SLATED FOR MAY 12 TO 29**

*Operations May be Extended due to Weather*

COLUMBUS – A spring oral rabies vaccination (ORV) operation, coordinated by the Ohio departments of Health (ODH) and Natural Resources (ODNR), plus the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services program, will begin May 12 in five northeast Ohio counties.

Baits containing vaccine will be distributed by vehicle and helicopter in target areas of northeastern Ohio. When raccoons eat the bait, they are immunized against rabies. This effort is designed to help curb the spread of raccoon-rabies variant (RRV) that was identified in Cuyahoga, Geauga and Lake counties in 2004. In 2008, seven rabid animals (four raccoons and three skunks) were confirmed positive from Lake County for RRV, compared to 19 rabid animals (10 raccoons and nine skunks) from Lake and Cuyahoga counties in 2007.

“ODH and its partners remain committed to containing raccoon-rabies variant in Ohio,” said ODH Director Alvin D. Jackson, M.D. “Local, state and federal agencies working together make this goal possible.”

Oral Rabies vaccine (ORV) will be distributed in a roughly 695-square-mile area in all of Lake County; northwest of Interstate 80 in Portage County; east of Interstate 77 in Cuyahoga County; in western Geauga County and in northern Summit County. In urban and residential areas, teams in trucks will distribute vaccine-laden baits; while an ODNR helicopter will distribute baits in more rural areas.

Residents should be aware that seeing a low-flying helicopter may mean that vaccine-laden baits have been dropped in the area. Residents should keep children and pets away from the baits, so raccoons have every chance to eat them.

“This campaign is essential protecting and improving the health of Ohioans,” Jackson said. “Please follow this advice.”

Ground, vehicle and helicopter teams will distribute vaccine-laden packets in a hard, brown 2-x-2-inch fishmeal block. About 135,000 total baits will be distributed.

Weather permitting, the operation will start Tuesday, May 12, and continue through May 29. Ground baiting may be extended, depending on the weather.

This operation is part of a national ORV program, which has been conducted in Ohio and other states since 1997. By vaccinating raccoons along Ohio’s eastern border, an immune barrier has been created that has successfully slowed the spread of RRV into Ohio from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The fall 2009 ORV baiting is slated for late August or early September.

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## **ODH Rabies Baiting**

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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. Ground, vehicle and helicopter crews will use one type of bait, called a fishmeal polymer block. In this bait the vaccine-laden 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 1-888-722-4371.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects animals and people. The variant 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.

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**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.”