

Wildlife Rabies Vaccination Project*

Northeastern New York State

What is the Wildlife Rabies Vaccination Project?

Just as children are vaccinated against diseases like measles and mumps, raccoons can be vaccinated against rabies. Like the polio vaccine for children, the rabies vaccine for raccoons is taken by mouth.

How is a raccoon vaccinated?

A raccoon is vaccinated when it bites into a bait containing the vaccine. The vaccine used is the only one currently available that works orally in raccoons. The pink vaccine is sealed inside a tiny plastic bag (sachet) that is either coated with a flavoring, or contained inside a bait which is made from a compressed mixture of fish meal and fish oil known to appeal to raccoons. Baits are dropped in areas frequented by raccoons via helicopter or planes, or by driving or walking along roads and trails. The baits have a strong smell that is not attractive to people. Baits are not available to individual homeowners--they are distributed as part of state-approved wildlife vaccination programs.

Why do raccoons need to be vaccinated?

Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system of raccoons and other mammals including humans. The disease is always fatal once clinical signs of infection occur. The spread of raccoon rabies is of great concern because the high numbers of raccoons in areas of New York State make it more likely for a human, a pet or farm animal to encounter a rabid raccoon. Vaccination will greatly decrease the chance of human and domestic animal contact with rabid raccoons.

Where is the vaccination area?

The NYSDOH vaccination area for 2008 is in eastern Essex County and southern Clinton County, Aug. 18-31. The USDA will coordinate baiting northern Clinton County and a small area of eastern Franklin County Aug. 25-31, as well as a program to humanely capture raccoons, inject them with rabies vaccine, and release them, to be conducted in northeastern Clinton County May thru October. Baits are dropped to create a barrier of immune raccoons that will prevent the northward advancement of raccoon rabies.

How is the project's success measured?

Raccoons are humanely live-trapped in the vaccination area several weeks after baiting. Blood samples are drawn to be tested for antibodies against rabies, and the captured raccoons are released. The presence of antibodies means a raccoon has developed immunity against rabies after vaccination. Increased surveillance for sick or dead raccoons (including roadkills) is conducted to better track the presence of rabies.

How can you help?

It would be helpful to keep all dogs and cats indoors or on leashes during the bait distribution and for about a week afterward. This will allow raccoons to eat the vaccine-laden baits and become immunized, and decreases the chance of pets eating the baits instead. Please do not disturb the baits, and instruct children to leave them alone. **Please report any sick or strange-acting raccoons, skunks, or foxes observed in Clinton, Franklin, Essex, Warren, or Washington counties to the health department.** Phone numbers for Clinton County: (518) 565-4870; Franklin County: 518-481-1710; Essex County: (518) 873-3500; Warren County: (518) 761-6580; Washington County: (518) 746-2400.

* The Oral Rabies Vaccination Project is conducted by the New York State Department of Health, along with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, the Departments of Environmental Conservation and Agriculture & Markets, and the Clinton and Essex County Health Departments.

What is in the bait?

The liquid vaccine is encased within a white plastic bag (sachet) that somewhat resembles a fast-food style ketchup container. This sachet may be coated with a thin fishmeal flavoring, or encased in a brown, square fishmeal mixture block. The flavor coating and fishmeal mixture are designed to primarily attract raccoons. A label printed in black on each bait reads "**RABIES VACCINE LIVE VACCINIA VECTOR. DO NOT DISTURB Merial, Inc US VET LIC NO 298 1-877-722-6725**". The toll-free number connects the caller to the New York State Department of Health Zoonoses Program. Additional information, with photographs of the baits, is available on the Zoonoses Program website at: <http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/>

What if I find a bait near my home?

Leave it alone. If the bait is intact and out in the open where pets or children are more likely to encounter it, toss it into deeper cover under trees or bushes while wearing gloves.

Are gloves required to handle the bait or will I be harmed if I handle the intact bait without gloves?

It is not harmful to touch an intact bait. However, because of the offensive odor gloves are recommended. Wash hands thoroughly after any direct contact with the bait.

What if my dog or cat eats a bait?

The baits are not harmful to dogs or cats, but a pet may vomit if he/she eats a large number of them. If a pet chews a bait, do not try to take it away from the animal since you may be bitten in the process. There is a risk, although very low, of infection with the vaccinia virus contained in the vaccine in such situations. (You cannot contract rabies from the vaccine, however.) Please wear gloves or use a plastic bag if you handle the damaged bait after the pet drops it. Damaged baits can be bagged and disposed of in regular trash. If you have direct skin contact particularly with the pink liquid vaccine inside the bait, wash the area with soap and water. **Please call your county health department, or the phone number printed on the bait (1-877-722-6725) to report any exposure to the vaccine or bait.**

What if my child eats the bait?

The bait itself will not harm the child. In the unlikely event that a child bites through the sachet and ingests the liquid vaccine, contact your county health department.

If my child or pet ingests the vaccine, will either of them get rabies?

It is not possible to get rabies from the vaccine. The vaccine does not contain the rabies virus.

Can this vaccine be used to vaccinate my dog or cat against rabies?

No, this vaccine is approved only for use in wildlife. Vaccination of pets should be done by veterinarians in accordance with state regulations. Pet vaccination is essential to protect your pet against rabies.

📞 If you have any questions, call the NYS Department of Health at (518) 474-3186 from 8:30 am to 4:45 p.m., Monday through Friday. For after-hour emergencies, call the Public Health Duty Officer at 1-866-881-2809.

Bait to be used
in Helicopter
Zone (Actual
size approx.
1 ¼ inch)



Bait to be used in
Airplane Zone (Actual
size approx. 1 ¾
inch)



New York State Department of Health / United States Department of Agriculture
 Raccoon Oral Rabies Vaccination Project
 August 18-31, 2008



- Approximately 120,000 baits will be distributed from a small fixed-wing aircraft in Northern Clinton County during August 25-31.
- Approximately 160,000 baits will be distributed from a dark blue New York State Police helicopter in rural areas, and from ground vehicles in more residential areas in Essex County and Southern Clinton County during August 18-31.
- During May-October, raccoons in Northeastern Clinton County will be humanely live-trapped, vaccinated, and released (TVR).
 - During September and October raccoons in the baited zone will be humanely live-trapped, blood-tested, and released to determine success of baiting.
 - If a person or pet contacts the bait, please call the county health department (Clinton County 518-565-4840, Essex County 518-873-3500, Franklin County 518-481-1710, Warren County 518-761-6580, Washington County 518-746-2400).