

Raccoon Rabies Control Program in Nassau County, 2011*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Raccoon Rabies Control Program?

The Program includes enhanced surveillance to find raccoon rabies, and vaccination of raccoons to prevent the spread of rabies. Just as children are vaccinated against diseases like measles and mumps, raccoons can be vaccinated against rabies. Some vaccines for raccoons can be injected; others can immunize the raccoon when the raccoon eats a bait containing the vaccine.

How is a raccoon vaccinated?

Two types of vaccination can occur in a wildlife rabies vaccination project. A raccoon can be humanely captured in a trap, vaccinated just like a pet with an injection, and then released. This is called a trap-vaccinate-release (TVR) program. In an oral rabies vaccination program (ORV) a raccoon is vaccinated when it bites into a bait containing the vaccine. The vaccine used in ORV 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. In most areas, baits are dropped in areas frequented by raccoons via helicopter or by hand distribution along roads and trails. In some areas, baits are taken by raccoon from bait stations that are temporarily deployed in areas of raccoon habitat. The baits have a strong smell that is not attractive to people. The baits are not available to individual homeowners – they are only 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 essentially always fatal once clinical signs of infection occur. Fortunately, rabies in humans is rare in the United States, with five or fewer cases reported per year. However, rabies exposures and subsequent human rabies treatments are common. 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 and when will it occur?

For the October 2011 ORV, the vaccine baits will be distributed by hand tossing from a slow moving truck. The baits will be deployed in the north western portion of Nassau County.

Hand baiting is scheduled to begin on October 11th and may continue through October 29th. Further updates will be provided as information becomes available.

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 road kills) is conducted to better track the presence of rabies.

How can you help?

Young children should not be outside unsupervised and older children should be advised not to touch any bait. 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 mammals (except small rodents) observed at any time to the Nassau County Department of Health at 516-227-9663.**

What is in the bait?

The liquid vaccine is encased within a clear plastic bag (sachet) that somewhat resembles a fast-food style ketchup container. The vaccine contains attenuated vaccinia virus. This sachet is encased in a brown, square fishmeal mixture block. The fishmeal mixture blocks are designed to primarily attract raccoons. A label printed in black on each bait reads **“RABIES VACCINE LIVE VACCINIA VECTOR. DO NOT DISTURB MERRILL, INC US VET LIC NO 298 1-877-722-6725”**. The toll-free number connects the caller to the **Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222)**. Additional information, with photographs of the baits, is available on the Zoonoses Program website at: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/zoonoses/zoonoses.htm>

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 or using a plastic bag.

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

Although it is not harmful to touch an intact bait, you should always wear gloves or use a plastic bag when coming in contact with the bait. After moving the bait, persons should remove their gloves and immediately wash their hands thoroughly. Damaged baits can be double bagged in plastic and disposed of in regular trash.

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.) Wear gloves or use a plastic bag if you handle the damaged bait after the pet drops it. Damaged baits can be double bagged and disposed of in regular trash. If you have direct skin contact, particularly with the pink liquid vaccine inside the bait, immediately wash the area with soap and water and call the **Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222)** to report your exposure.

What if a person or pet comes in contact with the bait?

The rabies vaccine contains attenuated vaccinia virus. This is a weakened version of the virus used in people for smallpox vaccination. Therefore, it is very important that anyone who touches the bait (even if the intact) wash his/her hands immediately. While the bait packet itself will not harm anyone, the **Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222)** should be contacted whenever: (1) any person comes into contact with bait while bare-handed; (2) a child bites through the bait packet and ingests the liquid; (3) a pet is seen with bait in its mouth. To date, only one person has been reported to have developed serious complications from contact with the vaccine, despite thousands of reports of human contact with the baits. The risk of side effects is likely to be higher in immunocompromised individuals or those with certain skin conditions. The skin lesions associated with vaccinia infection from ORV exposure may be indistinguishable from skin lesions associated with an exposure to smallpox.

What if my child eats the bait?


The bait itself will not harm the child. There is a risk, although very low, of infection with the vaccinia virus contained in the vaccine in such situations. In the unlikely event that a child bites through the sachet and ingests the liquid vaccine, call the **Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222**.

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 Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

**The Raccoon Rabies Control Program is conducted by the New York State Department of Health in cooperation with county, university, other state, and federal agencies, including the United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services.*

New York State and Nassau County Departments of Health

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