

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Raccoon-Rabies Vaccination Baiting Begins August 23***Operations May be Extended due to Weather Conditions*

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health (ODH), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and local health departments, will begin annual fall oral rabies vaccination operations this week in 14 northeast Ohio counties. Weather permitting, baiting will begin on or around Friday, Aug. 23 and will cover 4,825 square miles of the state’s northeastern and eastern border. Bait distribution should be completed by approximately Tuesday, Sept. 3.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects mammals including people and is almost always fatal. Oral rabies vaccination baiting operations are intended to immunize raccoons that are at greatest risk of being exposed to raccoon rabies coming into the state. The goal is to create an “immune barrier” along the Ohio state line that can prevent the spread of the raccoon variant of rabies across the rest of the state.

Approximately 800,000 baits will be distributed by various methods in each county including fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter, and ground vehicles. Residents in the areas to be baited should be aware of low-flying aircraft and should keep children and pets away from the baits.

This year’s oral rabies vaccination baiting will occur in the following counties:

- Ashtabula
- Belmont
- Carroll
- Columbiana
- Geauga
- Harrison
- Jefferson
- Lake
- Mahoning
- Monroe
- Portage
- Stark
- Trumbull
- Tuscarawas.

Ohio has participated in the oral rabies vaccination program since 1997. The bait used is called ONRAB, which consists of a 1” X 2” blister pack filled with the vaccine and covered with a sweet-smelling dark green waxy coating (see attached photo).

ONRAB has been proven safe in many species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Humans and pets cannot get rabies from contact with the baits, but people are asked to leave them undisturbed should they encounter them. If contact with baits occurs, immediately rinse the contact area with warm water and soap.

Please keep the following information in mind:

- Instruct children to leave the baits alone.
- The baits are not harmful to pets. However, it is recommended to keep dogs and cats inside or on leashes for up to five days after baiting occurs to give raccoons and other wildlife an opportunity to eat the baits. Most baits disappear within 24 hours.
- Do not try to remove bait from a pet's mouth to avoid potential injury.
- Anyone handling baits should wear gloves. If baits are found in areas frequented by pets or children, toss them into deeper ground cover. Damaged baits can be disposed of in the trash.
- If a person is exposed to the liquid vaccine within the bait, thoroughly wash exposed skin with soap and warm water.
- Anyone with questions about the baiting can call the Oral Rabies Vaccination Baiting Information Line at (888) 574-6656 or call your local health department.

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of infected animals, most often in raccoons, skunks, and bats, and is spread when saliva from an infected animal gets into a wound or mucous membrane (such as the eye or mouth). Animal bites are the most common route of exposure. Bats and raccoons pose the greatest risk of rabies in Ohio.

During 2018, 12 animals were confirmed to be infected with the raccoon variant of the rabies virus in Ohio. These animals were found in Carroll (3), Mahoning (3), Trumbull (1), and Tuscarawas (5) counties. So far in 2019, two raccoons from Ashtabula and Tuscarawas counties have tested positive for rabies. More information about rabies in Ohio is available at [www.odh.ohio.gov/rabies](http://www.odh.ohio.gov/rabies).

To protect your family from rabies:

- 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.
- Potential rabies exposures should also be reported to your local health department.

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**Resource:**

USDA APHIS Wildlife Services

<http://arcg.is/01PXLp> (National oral rabies vaccination daily progress map)