Raccoons and Rabies
Questions and Answers About Oral Rabies Vaccine

In Allegheny County, oral rabies vaccine baiting is anticipated to run: August-September, 2009

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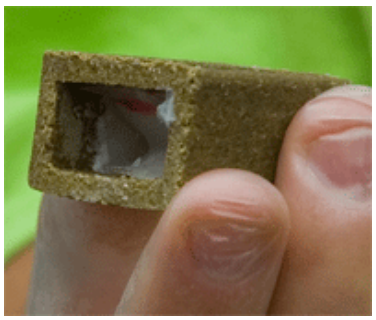
Report a raccoon hot spot. (link)

Why are there concerns about raccoons and rabies?

Raccoon rabies is found throughout Pennsylvania. It is a viral infection that can affect the nervous system of any mammal, including humans. The disease is almost always fatal to both people and animals. Raccoon rabies spreads rapidly and infects large numbers of raccoons. The disease often spreads to other wildlife and pets, making human exposure a real concern. To address this problem, federal, state and county agencies are participating in a combined program, to keep this animal epidemic from spreading further westward by attempting to eliminate or at least greatly reduce raccoon rabies in western Pennsylvania counties.

The oral rabies vaccine bait, shown at right, consists of a square block made from a compressed mixture of fishmeal and fish oil known to attract raccoons. The vaccine (dyed pink) is inside a plastic packet that is inserted in the middle of the block. Baits are distributed from vehicles or airplanes. Most of the baits will be consumed about five days after being distributed. People should tell their children to leave the baits alone. Pet owners are asked to keep their dogs and cats inside or on leashes so raccoons can eat the baits.



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, but the fish oil and odor on the bait may get on your fingers. Wear gloves or protect your hands if the bait has broken open or is damaged or leaking by using a paper towel or plastic bag to pick it up. As a precaution, wash your hands thoroughly after any direct contact with the bait.

What if I find bait near my home?

Leave it alone. However, if the bait is intact and out in the open or where contact by pets or children is possible, wearing a glove, toss it into deeper cover.

What if my dog or cat eats the bait?

It is not harmful if your pet consumes a small quantity of baits. Because additional baits may have been dropped nearby, check the area for more. Any other baits can be removed and placed in areas more likely to be found by a raccoon than a pet.

Is the vaccine harmful?

The vaccine is not harmful to wild animals or pets. Although the exposure risk to humans is very slight, the following information is important:

- Be aware of what a bait looks like.
- Encourage children to leave the baits alone.
- Keep dogs and cats inside or on leashes at least five days after your area has been baited.
- Do not attempt to take a bait away from your pet; you may be bitten!
- Wash your hands or exposed skin thoroughly with soap and water if you touch the bait or the liquid vaccine inside the bait.

What happens if my child eats or has contact with the vaccine? Will my child get rabies?

The bait has a strong fish odor and is usually unappealing to children. It is not possible to get rabies from the vaccine. The vaccine contains only a single gene that expresses the outer layer of the rabies virus, which is set into a non-rabies "carrier" virus.

People with certain medical conditions, such as an immunodeficiency problem, may be prone to a treatable infection from the carrier virus if the vaccine (pink liquid) gets into an open wound, or contacts a mucus membrane such as the eyes or mouth. Rinsing the eyes or using soap and water to wash any area exposed to the vaccine can prevent this.

Please call the Pennsylvania Public Health Information Line at 1-877-PA HEALTH, the Erie Co. Department of Health at 1-814-451-6700, or the Allegheny Co. Health Department at 1-412-687-2243 if you are exposed to the vaccine or need advice.

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

No, this vaccine is approved only for use in wildlife. A veterinarian, in accordance with state and local regulations, should vaccinate your pets. Regular pet vaccination is essential to protect your pet against rabies.

How is a raccoon vaccinated?

A raccoon is vaccinated by eating a bait containing the vaccine. The raccoon will develop antibodies in two to three weeks that may protect it if it is exposed to another infected raccoon. If enough raccoons are vaccinated, the risk of the spread of rabies will be greatly reduced.

The bait is intended for wild animals – specifically raccoons. Everyone can help by keeping their pets inside or on leashes during the baiting time and for about five days afterwards. This will help to prevent your pet from getting the baits and gives raccoons a chance to eat the baits.

Important Reminders:

- Do not attempt to take a bait away from your pet! It is never a good idea to take food from the mouth of an animal. You may be bitten!
- Leave baits in place if possible. If the bait is out in the open where contact with pets or children could occur, put on gloves and toss it into deeper cover.
- Damaged baits should be placed in a baggie and disposed of in normal trash.
- If you have skin contact with either the bait or the pink liquid vaccine, wash the area of contact with soap and water.
- If you have eye or mucous membrane contact, rinse the area with water.
- If you have skin or mucous membrane contact (such as the eyes or mouth) with the pink liquid vaccine, please contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health (1-877-PA HEALTH) for additional information.
- Immediately call your physician and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (1-877-PA HEALTH) if you develop a rash after contact with a bait.
- **Please call the Pennsylvania Public Health Information Line 1-877-PA HEALTH, the Erie Co. Dept. of Health 1-814-451-6700, or the Allegheny Co. Health Department 1-412-687-2243 if you need advice.**

Rabies: Six Ways to Protect Yourself and Your Family:

- Do not feed, touch or adopt wild animals, and be cautious of stray dogs and cats. Rabid animals do not always appear ill or vicious!
- Teach children to leave wildlife alone. Be sure your children know to tell you if an animal bites or scratches them.
- Have your veterinarian vaccinate your dogs, cats, or ferrets against rabies. Keep pet vaccinations up-to-date.
- Tightly close garbage cans. Open trash attracts wild or stray animals to your home or yard.
- Feed your pets indoors; never leave pet food outside as this attracts wildlife.
- Call your doctor and your local health department for advice if an animal bites or claws you.

Report the incident immediately!

The Oral Rabies Vaccination Project is conducted by the Pennsylvania Departments of Agriculture and Health, the Erie County Department of Health, Allegheny County Health Department, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U S Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (USDA/APHIS/WS).

2009 ANTI-RABIES RACCOON BAITING PROGRAM

Northern Communities are defined as those north of the Allegheny or Ohio Rivers while Southern Communities are those located south of the Monongahela or Ohio Rivers. Eastern Communities are located between the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers.

NORTHERN COMMUNITIES		SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES		EASTERN COMMUNITIES	
Aleppo Twp.	Aspinwall	Baldwin Boro	Baldwin Twp.	Braddock	Braddock Hills
Avalon	Bell Acres	Bethel Park	Brentwood	Chalfant	Churchill
Bellevue	Ben Avon	Bridgeville	Carnegie	East McKeesport	East Pittsburgh
Ben Avon Hghts	Blawnox	Castle Shannon	Clairton	Edgewood	Elizabeth Boro.
Brackenridge	Bradford Woods	Collier Twp.	Coraopolis	Elizabeth Twp.	Forest Hills
Cheswick	East Deer Twp.	Crafton	Crescent Twp.	Forward Twp.	Glassport
Edgeworth	Emsworth	Dormont	Dravosburg	Liberty	Lincoln
Etna	Fawn Twp.	Duquesne	Findlay Twp.	McKeesport	Monroeville
Fox Chapel	Franklin Park	Green Tree	Heidelberg	North Braddock	North Versailles Twp.
Frazer Twp.	Glenfield	Homestead	Ingram	Oakmont	Penn Hills
Hampton Twp.	Harmar Twp.	Jefferson Hills	Kennedy Twp.	Pitcairn	Plum
Harrison Twp.	Haysville	McDonald	McKees Rocks	Port Vue	Rankin
Indiana Twp.	Kilbuck Twp.	Moon Twp.	Mt. Lebanon	South Versailles	Swissvale
Leet	Leetsdale	Mt. Oliver	Munhall	Trafford	Turtle Creek
Marshall Twp.	McCandless Twp.	North Fayette Twp.	Oakdale	Verona	Versailles
Millvale	Neville Twp.	Pennsbry Villag	Pleasant Hills	Wall	White Oak
O'Hara Twp.	Ohio	Robinson Twp.	Rosslyn Farms	Wilkins Twp.	Wilkinsburg
Osborne	Pine	Scott Twp.	South Fayette Twp.	Wilmerding	
Reserve Twp.	Richland Twp.	South Park Twp.	Stowe Twp.		
Ross	Sewickley	Thornburg	Upper St. Clair Twp.		
Sewickley Hghts	Sewickley Hills	West Elizabeth	West Homestead		
Shaler Twp.	Sharpsburg	West Mifflin	Whitaker		
Springdale Boro	Springdale Twp.	Whitehall			
Tarentum	West Deer Twp.				
West View					

All parts of Pittsburgh will be baited. Emphasis will be placed on baiting those areas along the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers, along stream banks and in regions having " Green Spaces " such as the four major parks (Frick, Highland, Riverview, Schenley) and cemeteries.