



Massachusetts Wildlife Rabies Vaccination Project

Raccoon Rabies Vaccination Project on Cape Cod in Massachusetts

The Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, United States Department of Agriculture/Wildlife Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is conducting a project to help control the spread of rabies in Massachusetts. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts and USDA/Wildlife Services fund this project.

What is raccoon rabies?

Raccoon rabies was first reported in Massachusetts in September 1992. Since that time, through 2006, there have been greater than 4,000 wildlife cases of rabies in Massachusetts. Domestic animals are at risk for developing rabies when they are bitten by an infected wild animal. Every year many people in Massachusetts are exposed to rabies either through direct contact with infected wildlife, or by contact with domestic dogs and cats exposed to infected wildlife.

What is the Massachusetts Wildlife Rabies Vaccination Project?

From 1994 to March 2004, this project created and maintained a barrier to keep Cape Cod free of rabies by vaccinating a large number of raccoons in towns surrounding the Cape Cod Canal. As of March 2004, the first rabies case was detected on Cape Cod beyond the canal, indicating a breach in the vaccine barrier, and rabies has since spread throughout the Cape. In cooperation with county, state and federal agencies, our new goal is to continue to vaccinate Cape Cod wildlife against this disease to reduce and then hopefully eliminate rabies on the Cape.

Where is the Project taking place?

The vaccination zone will cover the 10 town area from Yarmouth east through Provincetown.

How can free-ranging raccoons be vaccinated against rabies?

The vaccine is contained in baits that have a strong fish smell specifically attractive to raccoons and unpleasant to people. Raccoons that consume a vaccine-bait unit are vaccinated against rabies. This type of vaccine is desirable because it can be distributed in the environment and is self administered by wildlife. Vaccine containing baits are distributed from cars along roadsides in wooded, brush covered, and wetland areas where raccoons are likely to find and eat them. Helicopters and walking on foot are used to distribute baits in areas inaccessible by road. Driveways, lawns, buildings, schools and agricultural fields are avoided.

How long do baits stay in the environment?

Studies have shown that most baits are eaten within four days and almost all baits are gone in one week. If bait is not found and eaten, the bait will dissolve, exposing the vaccine packet. Sunlight inactivates the vaccine quickly, as does exposure to air.



Does the vaccine cause any ill effects in wildlife or pets?

Doses of up to 75 times the amount of vaccine contained in one bait have been fed to raccoons and dogs with no ill effects. However dogs that eat several of the fishmeal block baits may have a temporarily upset stomach from the fatty bait. A number of dogs are known to have eaten baits since the beginning of this program, and no ill effects other than an occasional upset stomach have been reported.

What might happen if a person finds a bait or becomes exposed to the vaccine?

The intact vaccine-bait unit is safe for people to handle. The liquid vaccine is enclosed within a plastic packet that is either sealed within a bait block, or simply coated with the fishy attractant. Each bait is labeled with a warning message that includes a number to call for information. If an intact bait is found, it should be placed in a brushy area where a person or pet would be unlikely to find it again. Chewed baits should be picked up with a paper towel and disposed of in the trash. If a healthy person ingests or has direct contact with the liquid vaccine itself, there should be no adverse health effects. In the event an immune-compromised person (a person undergoing chemotherapy, or a person with HIV infection) has exposure to the liquid vaccine itself, through ingestion or contamination of an open wound, or if the exposed person has a skin condition like eczema causing breaks in the skin surface, they could experience a reaction to the vaccine. *If any person is exposed to the liquid vaccine, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 1-888-658-2850 or (617) 983-6800.*

Can vaccine-containing baits be purchased for use in backyards?

Vaccine containing baits are not available for purchase by the general public or other groups. Distribution of the baits is a permitted activity through the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game.

What do we do if we see sick wildlife or are exposed to a rabid animal?

Call your animal control officer or the police if you see sick wildlife - do not handle wildlife without experienced help. If you or your pets are exposed to sick wildlife, try to safely capture the animal in a box with a broom, and then call for help. Do not handle with bare hands. Wash all wounds with soap and water thoroughly, and then contact your doctor or veterinarian. Always keep all your pets up to date on their rabies vaccinations.

For More Information Please Contact:

- 1) Your town Board of Health
- 2) Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine:
Project Co-Directors Janet Martin, DVM (774) 230-2210 and Alison Robbins (617) 633-9082
Both: (508) 887-4761 (voicemail), or (508) 839-7918 (main)
- 3) The Massachusetts Department of Public Health
For questions about human contact with bait, call MDPH: 1 (888) 658-2850, or (617) 983-6800
General rabies info at: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/rabies/rabies.htm>
- 4) Information is available through the following websites:
Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at: <http://tufts.edu/vet/wildlife/orv.html>
National rabies vaccine programs info at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ws/rabies/> and www.raboral.com/