



Annual Raccoon Rabies Vaccination Initiative Begins July 31

PITTSBURGH – The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services will begin the county’s annual Raccoon Rabies Vaccination Baiting Program on Monday, July 31, 2023.

Over the course of the five-week project, crews will distribute more than 300,000 baits in all 130 Allegheny County municipalities. Bait will be spread by hand from July 31 to August 4; aircraft, including helicopters and fixed-wing airplanes, will distribute bait until September 1.

“Allegheny County plays a critical role in rabies management and prevention in the United States,” explained Jamie Sokol, raccoon rabies baiting program coordinator. “Currently, raccoon rabies is primarily present in the eastern part of the country. Our efforts, as well as others, help stop the disease from spreading further into the interior of the country.”

As part of the program, residents might see low-flying, slow-moving aircraft pass over the same area multiple times. Some residents who are unaware of the program may find this unusual or alarming, so the Health Department asks for help in getting the word out about the initiative.

The baits consist of a small blister packet that contains a liquid vaccine inside. The bait is coated in fishmeal or a waxy, vanilla-flavored coating that attracts raccoons. Most of the baits will be consumed within five days of distribution.

Residents should avoid contact with the bait. However, if a resident comes in contact with the bait or the liquid vaccine inside, they should wash their hands and any other exposed area of skin with soap and water. In the unlikely event a rash develops, residents should contact their health care provider, immediately.

The baits are not harmful to pets. Still, residents are asked to keep their pets inside, or on leash, so they do not eat the baits before raccoons can ingest them. To ensure raccoons are hungry, the ACHD also asks residents to bring food sources indoors and that garbage containers have secure lids.

Rabies is a virus transmitted by animal bites or scratches. Exposures due to a bite or scratch are almost always fatal when left untreated. Any resident bitten, scratched or exposed to saliva from a stray or any other animal, should immediately cleanse the contact area with soap and water, seek emergency medical treatment and contact the Health Department by calling 412-687-ACHD (412-687-2243) to report the incident.

“Most of our reported rabies cases in animals in Allegheny County are from wild animals, a large portion from raccoons. Anything we can do to reduce the amount of rabies in our raccoon population is a benefit to the county’s overall public health,” said Dr. Barbara Nightingale, ACHD medical director. “The raccoon rabies baiting program reduces human exposure to the virus and medical costs associated with it, as well as protecting family pets from additional vaccination, quarantine and possibly needing to be put down.”

The Raccoon Rabies Vaccination Baiting Program has aimed to reduce the number of confirmed rabies cases in Allegheny County for 22 years ago.

For more information about the Raccoon Rabies Vaccination Baiting Program, visit: alleghenycounty.us/raccoon