Annual Raccoon Rabies Vaccine Baiting Project Set for July 31 – August 17

PITTSBURGH – The annual Raccoon Rabies Vaccine Baiting Program will kick off tomorrow, July 31, and will end on August 17. The program leaves edible rabies vaccines in habitats that raccoons are likely to visit. When eaten, a raccoon will develop immunity to the virus.

In recent years, the number of rabid raccoons has steadily declined in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Efforts to curb rabies in raccoons through programs such as this one, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is part of a multi-state effort to eradicate raccoon rabies. These efforts have significantly reduced the risk of this deadly disease for people and their pets. Read more about this effort here.

The local partnership between USDA’s Wildlife Services (WS) and the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) is marking its 19th year. In addition to employees of WS and ACHD, staff from the county’s departments of Human Services and Parks, Pittsburgh City Parks, USDA Veterinarian Services, and the PA Game Commission will be distributing more than 300,000 baits in all 130 municipalities across Allegheny County.

Baits are targeted at wooded areas, ditches, culverts, abandoned buildings, near dumpsters, and trash cans frequented by raccoons. While not harmful to pets or other wild animals, the baits are meant to be consumed by raccoons. Residents can play a part in this effort by considering the following recommendations:

- Keep pets on a leash, indoors or confined to their property as much as possible during the weeks of baiting and for one week following. This ensures that baits are left for the raccoons, and that raccoons are not scared away.
- Bring any food that raccoons might eat indoors and make sure that garbage containers kept outdoors have secure lids.
- Leave baits in place if possible. If the bait is out in the open, put on gloves and toss it into deeper cover. If the bait is damaged, put on gloves, and dispose of it in normal trash.
- Do not touch the bait with bare hands. If you do, immediately wash your hands and any other exposed area of skin with soap and water. In the unlikely event that a blister-like rash develops, you should contact your health care provider immediately.

Hand baiting, where the bait packets (squares that are similar in size to the block of a cell phone charger) are distributed by vehicle, will begin on July 31 and conclude by August 10. Additional hand baiting will be done in select parts of Lawrence (New Castle) and Washington counties (Canonsburg and Washington).

Helicopter baiting, done by WS, will occur between August 10-17 in Allegheny and Beaver counties. The helicopters will be flying in paths that fly north-to-south and south-to-north that will go over select residential areas. As the paths that the helicopters take are close together to ensure that enough baits get put out, residents may see the helicopters moving slowly over the same area multiple times within a short period of time. The bait packets, sachets, are similar in size to ketchup packets.

Rabies is a virus transmitted by an animal bite or scratch. Exposures due to a bite or scratch are almost always fatal when left untreated, but treatment is available. Any individual who is bitten, scratched or otherwise 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 call the Health Department (412-687-2243) to report the incident.
Residents should watch for unusual behavior in animals, and if any animal appears to be acting strange or becomes threatening, residents should notify their local animal control service, the police or the Pennsylvania Game Commission immediately. Residents should also make sure their pets are up-to-date on rabies vaccinations.

More information on the Raccoon Rabies Vaccination Baiting Project can be found on the ACHD website.

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