

# ORAL RABIES VACCINE DISTRIBUTION FAQ:

## **Cape Cod Oral Rabies Vaccination Project (CCORV)**

In collaboration with the The Cape Cod and Southeast Massachusetts Rabies Task Force, the United States Department of Agriculture/Wildlife Services is continuing a project to help control raccoon rabies in Southeast MA.

## **How prevalent is raccoon rabies in Massachusetts?**

Raccoon rabies was first reported in Massachusetts in September 1992. Since that time, through 2019, there have been greater than 6,700 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. In 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, we continue to vaccinate Cape Cod & Southeast MA wildlife against this disease to reduce rabies cases with an ultimate goal to prevent the reintroduction of raccoon rabies to Cape Cod.

## **Where is the Project taking place?**

The current vaccination zone will cover the area from the Cape Cod Canal east to Barnstable and south to Falmouth. In addition, Mainland Bourne and Sandwich, Plymouth, Wareham, and portions of Carver, Kingston, Middleboro, Rochester, Marion, and Lakeville will receive baits.

## **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, potentially, 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. Baits will also be dropped by helicopters. Driveways, lawns, buildings, schools and agricultural fields are avoided.

### **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 experience a temporary upset stomach. A number of dogs who have eaten baits have been reported since the beginning of our efforts and no ill effects other than an occasional upset stomach have been reported.

### **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 baits are not found and eaten, they will dissolve, exposing the vaccine packet to sunlight and air, making the vaccine ineffective.

### **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 fishmeal attractant. Each bait is labeled with a warning message that includes a number to call for information. If intact baits are found, they should be placed in brushy areas where people or pets are not likely to find it. Chewed baits should be picked up with a paper towel and disposed of in the trash. If a person in physically good condition has direct contact with or ingests the liquid vaccine, there should be no adverse health effects. If a person in a compromised state of health is exposed to the liquid vaccine through an open wound or by ingestion, they could experience a reaction to the vaccine. If any person or pet is exposed to the liquid vaccine, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at (617) 983-6800.

### **Can oral rabies vaccine baits be purchased for use in backyards?**

Oral rabies vaccine baits are not available for purchase by the general public or other groups. The distribution of the baits is a permitted activity through the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

### **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! If you do come in to contact with wildlife, wash all wounds with soap and water thoroughly; then, contact your doctor or veterinarian. Always keep your pets up to date on their rabies vaccinations.

### **For More Information Please Contact:**

1. United States Department of Agriculture: For questions regarding domestic animal contact with bait, call Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment at **(508) 375-6620**  
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health: For questions about human contact with bait, call MDPH at **(617) 983-6800**
2. Information is available through the following websites:  
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health: <http://www.mass.gov/dph/rabies>.  
The Cape Cod and Southeast Massachusetts Rabies Task Force at: [www.barnstablecountyhealth.org/cape-cod-rabies-task-force](http://www.barnstablecountyhealth.org/cape-cod-rabies-task-force).  
The Cape Cod and Southeast Massachusetts Rabies Task Force Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/CapeCodRabiesTaskForce/>
3. Vaccine information at: <http://www.raboral.com/>