NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Department of Health is working with the United States Department of Agriculture to help prevent rabies by distributing oral rabies vaccine for wild raccoons along Tennessee’s borders with Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. The annual baiting program administered by USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Wildlife Services, will begin Sept. 25.

“Control of raccoon rabies is vital to human public health. We are pleased to be part of this important and effective program now in its sixteenth year to reduce rabies in wildlife, which helps prevent transmission to people, pets and livestock,” said State Epidemiologist Tim Jones, MD.

Vaccine packets coated with fishmeal will be distributed throughout an 18-county area in Tennessee. The 2017 bait zone will include portions of Bradley, Carter, Cocke, Franklin, Greene, Grundy, Hamblen, Hamilton, Hawkins, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Monroe, Polk, Sequatchie, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington counties. Baits will be distributed by airplane and helicopter.

The oral rabies vaccine will be distributed on the following schedule:
• September 25 – October 13: Carter, Cocke, Greene, Hamblen, Hawkins, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington counties
• September 30 – October 25: Bradley, Franklin, Grundy, Hamilton, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Monroe, Polk and Sequatchie counties

“Rabies is most common in wild animals in Tennessee, and it poses a risk to people and domestic animals that come into contact with wildlife,” Jones said. “It’s important for pet owners to make sure racbies vaccinations are current for dogs and cats to ensure their health and safety, and to help provide a barrier between rabies in wild animals and humans. It is also extremely important that people don't transport raccoons from one area of the state to another.”

Rabies, once disease develops, is almost universally fatal. However, it is completely preventable if vaccine is provided prior to or soon after exposure.

This is the sixteenth year Tennessee has participated in baiting with rabies vaccine to slow and possibly halt the spread of raccoon rabies. There have been three cases of raccoon variant rabies in eastern Tennessee to date in 2017. Since raccoon rabies was first detected in Tennessee in 2003, the disease has not spread as rapidly here as has been documented in other areas of the United States.
Although the vaccine products are safe, the USDA Wildlife Services program has issued these precautions:

- If you or your pet finds bait, confine your pet and look for other baits in the area. Wear gloves or use a towel and toss baits into a wooded or fencerow area. These baits should be removed from where your pet could easily eat them. Eating the baits won't harm your pet, but consuming several baits might upset your pet's stomach.
- Don't try to remove an oral rabies vaccine packet from your pet's mouth, as you could be bitten.
- Wear gloves or use a towel when you pick up bait. While there is no harm in touching undamaged baits, they have a strong fishmeal smell. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water if there is any chance the vaccine packet has been ruptured.
- Instruct children to leave baits alone.
- A warning label on each bait advises people not to touch the bait, and contains the rabies information line telephone number.

For more information on rabies prevention or the oral rabies vaccine program, call the USDA Wildlife Services toll-free rabies line at 1-866-487-3297 or the Tennessee Department of Health at 1-615-741-7247. You may also find rabies information on the TDH website at [http://tn.gov/health/article/rabies](http://tn.gov/health/article/rabies).

The Tennessee Department of Health urges people to enjoy wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats from a distance and keep pets up-to-date on rabies vaccination to help protect them from exposure to rabies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a website to help educate children about rabies. Visit the site at [www.cdc.gov/rabiesandkids/](http://www.cdc.gov/rabiesandkids/).

TDH will also take part in World Rabies Day September 28, 2017. Founded by the CDC and the Alliance for Rabies Control, the goal is to increase awareness about rabies and support for prevention and control efforts. Despite being 100 percent preventable in humans, it is estimated more than 55,000 people worldwide die from rabies each year. In the United States, some 30,000 to 40,000 people are potentially exposed to rabies and require post-exposure treatment every year. Learn more about World Rabies Day at [https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/](https://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/).

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