

 **NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs  
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### **USDA Distributes Oral Rabies Vaccine in Florida**

WASHINGTON, February 14, 2012--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will distribute oral rabies vaccine baits this month to continue to evaluate the effectiveness of bait stations as a means to reduce the incidence of raccoon rabies in parts of west-central Florida. The vaccine distribution will begin on or around February 21 as part of ongoing cooperative rabies control efforts in the United States.

In cooperation with the Pasco County and Pinellas County Animal Services, 2,700 oral rabies vaccination (ORV) baits targeting raccoons will be distributed by bait stations in four nine-square-kilometer areas. The area includes southern Pinellas County and the J. B. Starkey Wilderness Area in Pasco County. Up to 36 bait stations (a delivery device for ORV baits) will be positioned strategically where raccoons are likely to travel in southern Pinellas County. Personnel from USDA's wildlife services (WS) will be asking residents of southern Pinellas County for permission to place the stations on their properties to effectively test the stations.

Since 1995, APHIS, and its cooperators have been applying a variety of baiting techniques to try to eliminate raccoon rabies from portions of Florida. Rabies poses a threat to wildlife populations, pets and public health and safety. APHIS began cooperative efforts in Pinellas County in 2003, which as a peninsula is an ideal landscape for testing raccoon-rabies elimination strategies. In 1995, Pinellas County reported 30 rabies cases; the number of cases decreased to 1 in 2009.

Oral rabies vaccination baits are coated with a fishmeal attractant and may be packaged in one-inch square cubes or two-inch plastic sachets. Humans and pets cannot get rabies from contact with the baits, but are asked to leave them undisturbed should they encounter them. This vaccine has been shown to be safe in more than 60 different species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Dogs that consume large numbers of baits may experience an upset stomach, but there are no long-term health risks. Should contact with baits occur, immediately rinse the contact area with warm water and soap. For photos of the vaccination baits, please visit [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/oral\\_rabies/photo\\_gallery.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/oral_rabies/photo_gallery.shtml).

Most sightings of rabid raccoons occur during the spring and summer months when people are more likely to come into contact with wildlife. Raccoon rabies is caused by a virus that infects the central nervous system in mammals. Infected raccoons may display unusual behavior, either aggressive or calm and "friendly". Other signs include an inability to eat or drink, balance problems, circling, seizures, coma and finally death. While rabies is fatal, human exposures can be successfully treated, if treatment is sought immediately following a bite.

Since 1997, APHIS has been working to establish a rabies-free barrier in the eastern United States where the raccoon variety of rabies is known to exist. In addition to this work in Florida, APHIS has coordinated cooperative rabies control efforts from Maine to Alabama. A similar ORV distribution effort from 1995 to 2004 in Texas has effectively eliminated canine rabies carried by wild coyote and grey fox.

For additional information concerning the raccoon oral rabies vaccine program, please visit [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/oral\\_rabies/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/oral_rabies/index.shtml) or contact APHIS' WS toll free at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

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