



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



14th Annual Rabies Bait Drop Starts August 20

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BURLINGTON – Thirteen Vermonters have been vaccinated after being bitten by a rabid animal in 2010, including five people bitten by gray foxes this spring and summer.

As Vermont begins its 14th Annual Rabies Bait Drop on Aug. 20, Robert Johnson, state public health veterinarian for the past 17 years, is working to put the bites into perspective.

“The few bites we’ve had this year are not a trend, and everyone is doing fine after getting vaccinated,” Dr. Johnson said. “We’ve also had a few cases of people bitten by skunks and raccoons, which are animals that tend to be more aggressive. The bottom line is rabies has a foothold in the state – mainly among wild animals, and this is why the annual bait drop is so important.”

The bait drop project is part of an overall strategy by wildlife officials to try to stop the spread of rabies northward into Canada. Rabies is a fatal, viral disease found mainly in wildlife (especially raccoons, foxes, bats and skunks), but can infect domestic animals and people as well.

The virus can spread through the bite of, or contact with saliva from, an infected animal. Rabies vaccine – if given soon after a human is bitten by a rabid animal – is highly effective. Once the signs and symptoms of rabies start to appear, there is no treatment and the disease is almost always fatal.

There has not been a human case of rabies reported to the Vermont Department of Health since the disease was first recorded in the state in 1963.

This year, the baits will be dropped by low-flying aircraft into carefully plotted corridors of remote lowland areas and valleys along the Vermont border and northern Chittenden County. Two types of bait will be used, including small, hard brown pellets placed by hand by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, and 2-inch, flat, clear packets dropped from the planes. As wildlife eat the bait they are vaccinated.

Anyone who finds the bait should leave it untouched, unless it is discovered on a lawn or driveway. Remove the bait with a glove and wash your hands with soap and water.

The bait cannot cause rabies if it is touched or eaten and is not harmful to children or pets, but it does have a strong fishy smell if it gets on your skin.

Vermonters are asked to avoid any animal that shows strange behavior. Do not try to trap or capture the animal, but instead call the state’s Rabies Hotline at 1-800-472-2437 (1-800-4-RABIES). The hotline number is also printed on each bait.

For more information on rabies prevention efforts visit the Health Department’s website: healthvermont.gov.

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