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21st Rabies Bait Drop Set to Begin

Baited Rabies Vaccine to be distributed the week of August 7

BURLINGTON – Vermont is once again taking part in a nationally coordinated effort to halt the spread of rabies. Weather permitting, the annual Rabies Bait Drop will begin August 7. The week-long bait drop is part of a cooperative effort between Vermont and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services to stop the spread of the potentially fatal disease.

Rabies vaccine, in the form of sweet-smelling oral bait attractive to raccoons and skunks, will be dropped in rural areas from low-flying aircraft and placed by hand in residential centers. The more than 450,000 quarter-size blister pack baits will be distributed in 115 Vermont communities across nine counties.

“The bait is not harmful to adults, children, pets or other wildlife, and you can’t get rabies from it,” said Vermont Public Health Veterinarian Robert Johnson. The plane’s copilots will control an “on/off” switch to keep the bait from being dropped on roadways, near homes and other places where people may be.

Anyone who comes across any bait is asked to leave it undisturbed so that it can be eaten by the animals. If the bait must be moved, please use gloves. If your pet eats a bait, or a child brings one home, let officials know what happened to it by calling the Vermont Rabies Hotline (1-800-472-2437) or the toll-free number printed on the bait.

Rabies is a deadly viral disease of the brain that infects mammals. It is most often seen in raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats, but unvaccinated pets and livestock can also get rabies. The virus is spread through the bite of an infected animal or contact with its saliva. If left untreated, rabies is almost always fatal in humans and animals. However, treatment with the rabies

vaccine is nearly 100 percent effective when given soon after a person is bitten by a rabid animal.

So far this year, 23 animals in Vermont have tested positive for rabies, and 14 of those have been raccoons.

According to wildlife officials, rabid animals often show a change in their normal behavior, but you cannot tell whether an animal has rabies simply by looking at it. People should not touch or pick up wild animals or strays – even baby animals.

In addition to the bait drop, a USDA study in Burlington that began in 2015 is evaluating the impact of human residential density and vaccine bait density on the effectiveness of the oral rabies vaccine used in the bait.

Find out more about rabies in Vermont and the oral rabies vaccine bait drop at healthvermont.gov/rabies.

Watch a video of a 2016 aerial bait drop over West Virginia: <https://youtu.be/hGbniCU5-V8?list=PL46328461CF9E31E4>

If you suspect an animal may have rabies, call the Rabies Hotline: 1-800-472-2437 (1-800-4-RABIES) or 1-802-223-8697

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Aug. 8, 2017: Release updated to reflect the addition of three communities to the bait drop (now 115).