



Department of Health

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

JAMES V. McDONALD, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

MEGAN E. BALDWIN
Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner

July 31, 2023

Dear Colleague:

As in past years, a raccoon oral rabies vaccination (ORV) program will be conducted in various locations in New York State during which vaccine-laden baits are distributed by hand or aircraft in an effort to immunize raccoons against rabies. Because veterinarians may be consulted if a person or their pets have contact with the bait or vaccine, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is providing the following information about plans for the 2023 program, which will be conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Essex, Clinton, St. Lawrence, Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, Oneida, Onondaga, Niagara, Erie, Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties between July 24th and August 18th.

Field trials that were begun in 2012 in Clinton and Essex counties using the ONRAB vaccine were expanded to all the ORV areas of New York during 2013. Post-baiting surveillance has demonstrated that the ONRAB baits are effective at immunizing raccoons against rabies. Therefore, the ONRAB field trials will continue during 2023, and ONRAB will be the only vaccine distributed by USDA in New York this year. ONRAB has been used in Canada since 2006 to vaccinate raccoons against rabies. The bait is a plastic blister pack coated with a fat/wax attractant. The bait packet is approximately 1 in. x 1.5 in. and dyed green. The ONRAB vaccine is a live, attenuated human adenovirus Type 5 vector that has been modified to express the rabies glycoprotein gene that triggers the immune system to produce antibodies against the rabies virus.

The vaccine does not contain live rabies virus and cannot cause rabies in exposed humans or animals. Exposure to the vaccine virus could occur by consuming the bait, by handling partially consumed baits, or by being licked or bitten by an animal that recently consumed a bait. Fortunately, the vaccine is quite safe based on field trials and prior experience with application in the field.

Exposure to ONRAB may cause a cold-like infection in people who are pregnant or immunocompromised and come into contact with the liquid vaccine through mucous membranes or broken skin. Symptoms that may develop include a fever, sore throat, and headache (typical cold-like symptoms). Most adults have been exposed to adenoviruses during childhood, as adenoviruses are common and often cause asymptomatic respiratory infections.

ONRAB has been shown to be safe in many different species of animals, including domestic dogs and cats. Eating a large number of baits may cause temporary stomach upset in pets, but it does not pose a long-term health risk. Clients should not attempt to remove a bait from their pet's mouth; doing so may cause them to be bitten and could lead to vaccine exposure.

If you have a client who has handled the bait or vaccine, who reports their pet ingested part or all of a bait, or who reports being bitten by their pet after the pet ingested all or part of a bait, please contact your local health department.

Additional information about rabies and the ORV program is available on the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services website at:
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/programs/nrmp>.

You may also contact the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at (518) 473-4439 if you have questions. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this important public health effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andie Newman, DVM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andie Newman, DVM, MPH, DACVPM
State Public Health Veterinarian