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The Oral Rabies Vaccination Project is conducted by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida Department of Health, your local health departments, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (USDA/APHIS/WS).

Rabies Information Line
1-866-4USDA WS
(1-866-487-3297)

Questions and Answers About Oral Rabies Vaccine

Why are there concerns about raccoons and rabies?

Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system of mammals, including humans. The disease is almost always fatal to both people and animals. Raccoon rabies spreads rapidly and infects large numbers of raccoons. The disease often spreads to other wildlife and pets, making human exposure a real concern. To address the problem, The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida Department of Health, and other state, federal and local partners, initiated a program to vaccinate wild raccoons in the Central Western region of Florida. This vaccination program builds on the successes of the Pinellas County program.

What does Raboral VR-G® oral rabies vaccine bait look like?

A rabies vaccine packet is inserted into the hollow center of fishmeal polymer bait and is held in place by wax. The bait weighs 23 grams and is 1.25" x 1.25" x .75" in size. The vaccine packet contains 2 ml. of oral rabies vaccine.

How is a raccoon vaccinated?

A raccoon is vaccinated by eating a bait containing the vaccine. The raccoon will develop antibodies in two or three weeks. The antibodies will protect the raccoon if it is exposed to another infected raccoon. If enough raccoons are vaccinated, the disease can be stopped.

Can the vaccine cause rabies?

It is not possible to get rabies from the vaccine. The vaccine contains only a single gene of the rabies virus, not the entire virus.

What if my dog or cat eats a bait?

The bait is not harmful to pets or livestock if they find one and eat one. Because additional baits may have been dropped nearby, check the area for more. Any other baits can be removed and placed where they are more likely to be found by a raccoon, not your pet.

Are these baits or vaccines harmful to people?

The bait shell is made of fishmeal, an ingredient in animal feed so it is not harmful to touch an intact bait. However, the bait does have a strong odor, so wearing gloves is recommended. The vaccine (red liquid) inside the shell contains vaccinia virus. People with eczema and immunosuppressed conditions may be prone to a local infection from vaccinia if the vaccine (red liquid) gets into a wound or abrasion. Use soap and water to wash any skin area exposed to the vaccine to prevent this. Please call the Florida Oral Rabies Vaccine Information Line at 1-866-4USDA WS (1-866-487-3297) for further advice.

What if I find a bait near my home?

Leave it alone if it is intact and in an area where pet or child contact is not likely. However, if the bait is out in the open or where contact by pets or children is possible, put on gloves and toss it into deeper cover. If the bait is broken open or damaged, wear gloves or protect your hands by using a plastic bag before picking it up. However, a person should not touch the bait if they are less than 18 years of age, pregnant, or immunosuppressed.

Can this vaccine be used to vaccinate my dog or cat against rabies?

This vaccine is approved only for use in wildlife. A veterinarian, in accordance with state and local regulations, should vaccinate your pets. Pet vaccination is essential to protect your pet against rabies.

Is it now safe to handle or feed raccoons?

No, it is never safe to handle or feed raccoons. Raccoons are wild animals and can severely bite a person. Feeding them increases the chances that they can transmit disease to people or pets, and is against the law. You cannot be sure which raccoons have been vaccinated and which have not. People bitten by raccoons must be administered anti-rabies treatment if the raccoon is not available to be tested.

How can I help?

The bait is intended for wild animals- specifically, raccoons. Everyone can help by keeping their pets inside or on leashes during the baiting time and about five days afterwards. This will help to prevent you pet from getting the baits and gives raccoons a chance to eat the baits.