

INFORMATIONAL NEWS RELEASE:

Cape Cod Oral Rabies Vaccine Baiting Program:

Cape Cod Rabies Task Force Collaborate with United States Department Of Agriculture-Wildlife Services, Public Agencies and Volunteers to Reduce Raccoon Rabies on Cape Cod

Cape Cod, MA, April 7, 2016—In cooperation with the Cape Cod Rabies Task Force (CCRTF), the United States Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services (USDA) is continuing to support the Cape Cod Oral Rabies Vaccine (CCORV) Program to help reduce and eliminate raccoon rabies on Cape Cod. The Cape Cod ORV Program, which began in 1994, is praised as one of the longest running, increasingly successful projects to control rabies in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, the CCORV Program was one of the many public health initiatives which lost its state funding. The USDA, as a direct result of commitments by the CCRTF, local communities and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, will continue to fund its portion of the ORV baiting. The spring round of ORV baiting is set to begin the week of April 18.

The USDA continues to try to shift the bait zone west, seeking to bring the ORV bait zone closer to the canal. This fall, baiting will again be shifted west to reflect a decrease in rabies cases on the Mid-and Outer Cape. Bait distribution will occur again in the towns of Bourne (peninsular), Sandwich, Falmouth, Mashpee, Barnstable, Yarmouth, and a small section of Dennis near Chase Gardens Creek. For the first time since 2003, distribution will be added to Mainland Bourne, Plymouth, Kingston, Carver, Middleboro, Rochester, and Marion. The purpose of the shift is to create a larger buffer zone for Cape Cod, and to begin to provide vaccination for a larger area of Massachusetts.

The distribution will occur as follows:

- Plymouth, Kingston, Carver, Middleboro, Rochester, Marion, Mainland Bourne:
 - 48 bait stations will be filled April 18
 - Hand-baiting by town, county, & federal officials and volunteers will occur—April 18-22
 - Bait stations will be checked – April 25-29 OR May 2-6
 - Any remaining baits will be removed from bait stations – May 9-13

- Peninsular Bourne, Sandwich, Falmouth, Mashpee, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis:
 - 319 bait stations will be filled April 25-29
 - Hand-baiting by town, county, & federal officials and volunteers will occur May 2-4

- Bait stations will be checked – May 2-6 & 9-13
- Any remaining baits will be removed from bait stations – May 16-20
- Hand-distribution of remaining bait stations baits – May 23-24

When rabies first appeared in the state of Massachusetts in 1992, a group of concerned local, state, county and federal representatives started the Cape Cod Rabies Task Force to discuss and implement a protocol to keep rabies off of Cape Cod. In 1994 when the CCORV Program began, the CCRTF distributed Rabies Vaccine baits throughout towns surrounding the Cape Cod Canal. For over a decade, this program was successful in keeping rabies off the cape, using the canal as a natural barrier. Unfortunately, in March of 2004 the first terrestrial raccoon strain of rabies was discovered in Bourne. By 2006, rabies was found in every town across the Cape. For the next two years, portions of the Cape had been baited bi-annually in hopes of vaccinating as many animals as possible, in turn, protecting the wildlife and reducing the numbers of pet and human exposures to this potentially fatal disease.

The oral rabies vaccine is licensed for use by the USDA. The rabies vaccine is contained in baits that have a strong fish smell that is especially attractive to raccoons and unpleasant to humans. Raccoons that consume a vaccine-bait unit will be vaccinated against this fatal disease. Vaccine containing baits are distributed from cars along the roadside in wooded, brush covered, and wetland areas where raccoons are likely to find and eat them. Driveways, lawns, buildings, schools and agricultural fields are avoided. Studies have shown that most baits are eaten within four days and almost all baits are gone in one week. If baits are not found, the bait will dissolve, exposing the vaccine packet. Sunlight inactivates the vaccine quickly, as does exposure to air. Although, the vaccine will not harm domestic animals, people are urged to keep their dogs leashed to prevent them from scavenging the baits and vaccine packets. Humans who come into contact with the bait should dispose of them in brushy areas where children and dogs are not likely to find them and wash their hands thoroughly.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires people to vaccinate their dogs and cats for rabies to protect both animals and humans. People can also protect themselves from contracting rabies by following these simple guidelines: avoiding contact with wildlife or offering them food, disposing of food and trash properly, securing garbage cans tightly and reporting any wildlife behaving oddly to local health officials. Members of the public are advised to contact their local boards of health with any questions or concerns about vaccinating pets and the Cape Cod Oral Rabies Vaccine Program.