

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Kevin Montgomery (858-8688)
James Devald (439-7453)

Annual Rabies Vaccine Airdrop to Take Place in Erie and Niagara Counties
Airplane and Helicopter Vaccine Drops Scheduled

In its continuing effort to fight the spread of rabies, the Erie County and Niagara County Departments of Health, in conjunction with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services and the Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell University, will be continuing its aggressive raccoon rabies vaccination initiative with a fixed-wing airplane component lasting approximately five days, commencing August 31, 2008 (weather permitting). The helicopter-baiting component is scheduled to begin September 6, 2008, again weather permitting, and should take 3-4 days to complete.

Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Anthony Billittier stated, "Beginning Saturday, personnel from USDA Wildlife Services will be distributing vaccine-laden baits by fixed-wing aircraft over rural areas of Niagara and Erie counties. A helicopter will also be used along shorelines, streambeds, and power line rights-of-way throughout Erie and Niagara counties during the second week of September. Rabies is a very serious disease, and an immunized raccoon population will serve to decrease rabies exposure to people and domestic animals."

Niagara County Environmental Health Director James Devald, P.E., added, "It is important to stress that the baits are not harmful to people, pets, or wildlife. The baits consist of fishmeal, a wax binder, and fish oil. The vaccine chamber in the center of the bait is filled with an oral rabies vaccine that is licensed for use against raccoon rabies in the United States and Canada.

"If your dog picks up a bait packet, please do not risk getting bitten while attempting to remove the bait from the animal's mouth. It is also important to note that the bait will not attract raccoons to your property; raccoons that are already using the property will encounter the baits."

Dr. Billittier concluded, "If you find baits, please do not disturb them. Please keep your dogs and cats on leashes so that wild animals may eat the baits. And finally, if you are exposed to bait or vaccine, or if your pet eats a bait or brings a bait home, please call 1-877-722-6725 to report the occurrence, since it is important to know if domestic animals are attracted to a specific type of bait."

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