



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Oxiris Barbot, MD  
*Commissioner*

### **2019 Veterinary Alert # 3: Raccoon Rabies Vaccination in Upper Manhattan Parks**

- **Raccoons in northern Manhattan parks will be vaccinated against rabies using oral rabies vaccine baiting and trap-vaccinate-release method**
- **Vaccination effort is in response to 4 rabid raccoons identified in or near Inwood Hill Park in Manhattan**

*Please share with your colleagues in Veterinary Medicine and your staff*

April 12, 2019

Dear Veterinary Colleagues,

In 2019, 4 rabid raccoons, tested between Jan. 25 and March 4, 2019, have been reported from in or near Inwood Hill Park in Manhattan. This is the first time since 2011 that a rabid raccoon has been reported from Manhattan. From 2009 to 2011, a large raccoon rabies epizootic occurred in and around Central Park which was preceded by the identification of a rabid raccoon in Inwood Hill Park. The 2019 cluster of 4 rabid raccoons could also lead to southward movement of the virus among raccoons into Central Park which has an extremely dense raccoon population and lead to another large outbreak. To prevent further spread, the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation to vaccinate raccoons in Inwood Hill, Isham, Fort Tryon, Fort Washington, and Riverbank parks and the northern section of Central Park. Two methods will be employed: oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baiting and trap-vaccinate-release (TVR) to directly administer the rabies vaccine.

Oral rabies vaccine baits were distributed by Parks and DOHMH workers on April 9<sup>th</sup> in areas of the parks where it is difficult to set traps. The baits are not harmful to people, pets, or wildlife. Baits contain a packet of pink liquid vaccinia-rabies glycoprotein (V-RG) recombinant virus vaccine coated in a brown bait containing fishmeal, fish oil, and wax. Each bait contains approximately 2 mL rabies vaccine and is labeled with a toll-free number that routes to the NYC Poison Control Center.

Touching an intact bait is not harmful but gloves are recommended due to the strong odor. Wash hands after any direct contact with the bait. There is a very low risk of human infection with vaccinia virus from direct contact with the liquid vaccine (you cannot contract rabies from contact with the vaccine). Despite the millions of ORV doses distributed across the United States, there have only been two documented cases of human infection with vaccinia virus due to exposure to ORV, both of whom were exposed when bitten while trying to remove bait from a dog's mouth<sup>1,2</sup>. ORV has been used for the past four years in parts of NYC with no adverse events reported. Exposure to the vaccine may cause skin lesions similar to those caused by smallpox vaccination, and may similarly be spread person to person

through contact with such lesions. Persons at risk are those with atopic dermatitis or other active exfoliative skin conditions and those with immune deficiencies or immunosuppressive conditions. Persons who have direct skin contact, particularly with the pink liquid vaccine inside the bait, should wash the area with soap and water and call the Poison Control Center at 212-764-7667 (212-POISONS).

The TVR component of the vaccination effort will begin April 15<sup>th</sup>. Wildlife experts will humanely trap raccoons, vaccinate, tag for identification, and release the animals in the same location. Traps are placed in remote areas to keep pets and park visitors from disrupting them and each trap contains City contact information for use in emergencies. Additional round(s) of TVR and ORV will likely be needed to vaccinate raccoons born this spring. The Health Department is also continuing enhanced animal rabies surveillance to track rabies in NYC.

For more information about rabies in New York City, visit [www.nyc.gov/health/rabies](http://www.nyc.gov/health/rabies).

For information regarding rabies and baiting, visit the NYS Department of Health website: <http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/wildlife.htm>.

#### **If an ORV bait is found:**

- It is not possible to get rabies from the vaccine. The vaccine does not contain the rabies virus. It does contain attenuated vaccinia virus.
- If you find bait is intact and out in the open where pets or children are more likely to encounter it, toss it into deeper cover under trees or bushes while wearing gloves or using a plastic bag.
- Direct contact with ORV bait should be avoided. Any person who needs to handle ORV bait should wear gloves or use a plastic bag. Damaged baits can be bagged and disposed of in regular trash.
- The baits are not harmful to dogs or cats, but a pet may vomit if they eat a large number of them. **Do not try to remove a packet from an animal's mouth.**
- It is not harmful for persons to touch an intact bait. Call the Poison Control Center at 212-764-7667 (212-POISONS) in the unlikely event that a person has direct skin exposure to the pink liquid vaccine. Instruct the exposed person to wash hands immediately with soap and water and/or an alcohol based preparation.

#### **To prevent exposure to rabies:**

- Avoid contact with wild animals and stray animals.
- Make sure their dog or cat is up-to-date on its rabies vaccinations.
- Avoid leaving their pets outdoors unattended and feed them indoors.
- Avoid trying to separate animals that are fighting.
- Contact their veterinarian if their pet has been in contact with a raccoon, skunk, bat or any animal that might be rabid.

## **Animal Bites and Rabies Exposures:**

- **Report** animal bites and suspect animal rabies cases to the Health Department:
  - VPHS Animal Bite Unit (ABU) 646-364-1799
  - Outside business hours, Poison Control Center: 212-POISONS (212-764-7667)
- **Questions?** Contact the NYC Health Department:
  - For questions on rabies exposures in pets, animal bites, and other animal-related issues
    - Veterinary Public Health Services (VPHS) 646-364-1783
  - For questions on rabies exposures in people, PEP, and other human-related rabies issues
    - Bureau of Communicable Disease 347-396-2600
  - After Hours: NYC Poison Control Center 212-764-7667

## **Management guidelines for dogs and cats with a known exposure to a rabies vector species or any rabid animal**

- Never vaccinated
  - Euthanize or isolate in veterinary facility for up to 6 months at owner's expense
- Currently vaccinated
  - Immediately give booster vaccine. Confine and observe in owner's home for 45 days
- Not currently vaccinated
  - Managed on case by case basis

## **Management guidelines for healthy dogs and cats that have bitten a person**

- Confine and observe dog or cat for 10 days
  - If animal not currently vaccinated, do not vaccinate until end of 10-day observation period
  - If remains healthy, rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) not indicated for bite victim
  - If becomes ill, must be evaluated by veterinarian and the Health Department

As always, we greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation.

<sup>1</sup> Human infection due to recombinant vaccinia-rabies glycoprotein virus. N Engl J Med. 2001 Aug 23;345(8):582-6.

<sup>2</sup> Human vaccinia infection after contact with a raccoon rabies vaccine bait—Pennsylvania, 2009. MMWR 2009;58:1204–7.