



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

2023 Veterinary Alert #5: UPDATE - Raccoon Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) to Be Used in Staten Island to Help Control Raccoon Rabies on May 31 instead of May 25

- The New York City Department of Health will vaccinate raccoons by distributing oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits on May 31 (June 1 as alternative date) in parts of Staten Island using a low-flying helicopter.
- This baiting effort was [previously scheduled in Staten Island for September 2022](#) and postponed until this spring.
- ORV will be done using the Raboral V-RG™ bait, which contains a liquid vaccinia-rabies glycoprotein (V-RG) recombinant virus vaccine; it does not contain the rabies virus.
 - The baits are not harmful to dogs or cats, but a pet may vomit after eating a large number of them.
 - Exposures to humans could potentially occur through direct contact with the liquid vaccine; affected skin should be washed thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- [Rabies](#) has been circulating among raccoons in New York City since 1992.
 - To date in 2023, 5 animals with rabies have been reported, including one raccoon in Staten Island.

Please share with your colleagues in veterinary medicine and your staff.

May 25, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baiting in Staten Island will be conducted on May 31, 2023 (June 1st as alternative in case of inclement weather or other events) instead of May 25. Baiting in Staten Island was originally scheduled for fall 2022 but postponed until spring 2023. ORV will be done using the Raboral V-RG™ bait, which contains a liquid vaccinia-rabies glycoprotein (V-RG) recombinant virus vaccine. A low-flying helicopter will be used to distribute the vaccine over several parks, wooded areas, and less-populated sections of Staten Island. ORV has routinely been used each fall in NYC as a strategy to control rabies among raccoons since 2014. Routine ORV baiting in NYC is being planned for fall of this year, including Staten Island.

The raccoon variant of the [rabies virus](#) has been present in New York City (NYC) since 1992. This variant is most efficiently transmitted among raccoons with occasional spillover to other animals, usually skunks and cats. To date this year, five animals (1 skunk each in the Bronx and Brooklyn, 1 raccoon each in Queens and Staten Island, and 1 bat in Manhattan) have tested positive for rabies.

The baits are not harmful to people, pets, or wildlife. Raccoons are attracted to the brown fish-scented bait, each containing a small packet of pink liquid vaccine coated with an attractant made of fishmeal, fish oil, and wax. Each labeled bait contains approximately 2 milliliters of rabies vaccine. The baits are not harmful to dogs or cats, but a pet may vomit after eating a large number of them. In the event a pet encounters a bait, pet owners should not attempt to remove bait from the animal's mouth to avoid being bitten.

It is not harmful for persons to touch an intact bait. However, because of the offensive odor gloves are recommended. There is a risk, although very low, of human infection with the vaccinia virus after contact with the pink liquid vaccine (you cannot contract rabies from the vaccine). Persons who handle damaged bait should wear

gloves or use a plastic bag. Damaged baits can be bagged and disposed of in regular trash. 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).

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 to liquid vaccine while attempting to take bait away from their dogs (one was bitten)^{1,2}. Exposure 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 who have atopic dermatitis or other active exfoliative skin conditions and those with immune deficiencies or immunosuppressive conditions.

Veterinarians in New York City should be on the alert over the coming weeks and be aware that they may receive questions from pet owners regarding ORV.

VETERINARIANS MAY ADVISE CLIENTS AS FOLLOWS:

- It is not possible for a person or pet to get rabies from the vaccine because the vaccine does not contain the rabies virus; however, it does contain attenuated vaccinia virus.
- It is not harmful for persons to touch an intact bait, but gloves are highly recommended.
- Instruct anyone who had direct skin exposure to the pink liquid vaccine to immediately wash the affected skin with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and call the Poison Control Center at 212-764-7667 (212-POISONS).
- The bait packets have a strong fishmeal smell that is not attractive to people or to most other animals.
- A label clearly identifies each bait packet that reads: "Rabies Vaccine Live Vaccinia Vector. Do Not Disturb" and a toll-free number, 1-877-722-6725; callers will be routed to the Poison Control Center.
- Bait found near residences or in parks, but not in the open, should be left alone; baits out in the open where pets or children are more likely to encounter it should be tossed into deeper cover under trees or bushes while wearing gloves or using a plastic bag; dispose of damaged baits 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.**
- Residents who see raccoons should NOT try to trap the raccoons themselves. Call a licensed trapper instead.

For information regarding rabies and baiting, visit the NYC and NYS Health Department websites:

New York City Health Department: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/rabies.page>

New York State DOH: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies>

To view prior Veterinary Alerts, visit <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/zoonotic-vectorborne-publications.page>

As always, we greatly appreciate your partnership and cooperation.

Sincerely,

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

-Visit our webpage for more information and resources for veterinarians: [Zoonotic and Vector-borne Diseases: Information for Providers](#)
-If you do not receive these alerts via email and would like to be added to the distribution list, please email zivdu@health.nyc.gov