



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD
Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, May 24, 2023

NYC TO VACCINATE RACCOONS AGAINST RABIES IN STATEN ISLAND

The Health Department will distribute oral rabies vaccine to immunize raccoons and protect them from rabies infection

New Yorkers should always avoid contact with wild animals and vaccinate their pets against rabies

May 24, 2023 – The Health Department will be vaccinating [raccoons](#) against rabies. On May 25th, the Health Department will deploy baits with oral rabies vaccine from a helicopter at low altitudes over Staten Island’s wooded and marshy areas (weather dependent).

“Rabies is a serious disease but we are hard at work to protect humans, pets and wildlife,” said **Health Commissioner Ashwin Vasani**. “Our public health teams are taking to the skies to get vaccine where it’s needed most. While we immunize raccoons, New Yorkers can do their part by keeping their pets up to date on rabies vaccinations and maintain distance from wildlife. If you see an animal you believe to be acting strangely, please call 311.”

Baits with oral rabies vaccine are used to vaccinate raccoons in New York State including New York City. Annually, baits are distributed by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and numerous state/local partners in the eastern United States, with the goal of eliminating rabies virus in raccoons.

The small, brown colored baits are fish-scented and resemble a ketchup packet which conceals a small amount of pink, liquid vaccine. Raccoons are attracted to the odor, and when raccoons chew the bait, they can become immunized, protecting them against rabies infection. The bait itself does not harm people, but in extremely rare instances, exposure to the liquid may cause a rash. In the unlikely event someone comes in contact with the liquid, they should wash hands with warm, soapy water, talk to their doctor, and notify the NYC Poison Center at 212-POISONS (212-764-7667). The bait is not harmful to pets and cannot cause rabies, but it can cause vomiting if several baits are consumed. If pets find the bait, do not try to take it away from them to avoid being bitten and exposed to the vaccine.

Rabies is a fatal but preventable viral disease. It can spread to people and pets if they are bitten by a rabid animal. In NYC, rabies is mostly found in raccoons. The rabies virus infects the central nervous system. If a person or pet does not receive the appropriate medical care after a potential rabies exposure, the virus can cause disease in the brain, ultimately resulting in death. Rabies can be prevented by vaccinating pets, staying away from wildlife, and seeking medical care after potential exposures before symptoms start.

Raccoons

- Raccoons live in New York City and if seen during the day be cautious but not alarmed. Being out during the day does not mean it is rabid, it may just be looking for food.
- Do not feed raccoons.
- Observe raccoons from a distance.
- For more information about raccoons, visit [WildlifeNYC](#).

To protect yourself against rabies:

- Do not touch or feed wild animals, stray dogs or cats.
- Keep garbage in tightly sealed containers.
- Stay away from any animal that is behaving aggressively.
- Stay away from any wild animal that appears ill or acts unusually friendly. Call 311 to report a sick animal.
- Animals that have attacked, or appear likely to attack, should be reported to 911.
- Do not try to separate fighting animals.

To protect your pet against rabies:

- Keep pet vaccinations up to date and keep them leashed.
- Keep your dog leashed while outdoors.
- Do not leave your pets outdoors unattended.
- If your pet has been in contact with an animal that might be rabid, contact your veterinarian immediately and report the incident to 311.
- Feed pets indoors.

If you are bitten or scratched by an animal:

- Immediately wash the wound with lots of soap and water.
- Seek medical care from your health care provider.
- If the animal is not owned, and can be captured by authorized personnel, **call 311**.
- If the animal is a pet, get the owner's name, address and telephone number so the Health Department can monitor the animal.
- To report a bite, call the Animal Bite Unit (212-676-2483) between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. during the week. At night or on weekends, call 212-POISONS (764-7667).
- For information about medical follow-up, **call 311** or your medical provider.

For more information about rabies in New York City, visit www.nyc.gov/health/rabies.

For more information on the Oral Rabies Vaccine, please visit the following sites:

New York State Department of Health:

https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/rabies/fact_sheet.htm

United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service,
National Rabies Management Program: <http://tinyurl.com/usda-rabies>

The rabies vaccine baiting in Staten Island is being done this spring because it could not be completed last fall, the time when rabies vaccine work is typically done across NYC. The routine oral rabies vaccination work will take place in fall across NYC, including Staten Island, to improve vaccine coverage among raccoons.

So far in 2023, [five animals](#) (including one raccoon from Queens, one raccoon from Staten Island, one skunk from the Bronx and one skunk from Brooklyn and one bat from Manhattan) have tested positive for rabies.