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## **Rabies Vaccine Baits & Vaccination Programs**

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**December 17, 2015**

In response to the recent incursion of raccoon-variant rabies in the greater Hamilton area, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) has been distributing oral rabies vaccine baits in an effort to immunize the local raccoon population. **A map of the planned baiting area as of December 16, 2015 has been provided by MNRF and is posted on the OMAFRA rabies website** (see link below). The baits will also vaccinate most foxes and skunks that chew on them. An information sheet, including an image of the baits, is available on the Ontario.ca website (see link below).

Exposure to the bait is not harmful to people or pets, but people or pets that come in contact with the vaccine inside the bait are advised to contact their physician or veterinarian as a precaution. **Here are the key points that veterinarians should know and communicate to pet owners about the baits:**

- The baits cannot be used to vaccinate domestic animals. They are specifically designed to vaccinate wildlife. Pets still need to be vaccinated with a licensed injectable product.
- The baits contain a live recombinant vaccine which CANNOT cause rabies in animals. However, it is a live virus so the immune system will respond to it. Based on this, exposure to the vaccine could potentially have some effect on animals (or people) that are immunosuppressed, but this has not been studied.
- Exposure to the liquid vaccine inside the product is otherwise not harmful to pets, however if a pet eats/swallows a bait it could develop indigestion from the sugary/waxy coating that is designed to attract wildlife to the baits. The vaccine itself is contained within a thin plastic blister pack beneath the coating, which could pose a limited risk of obstruction if swallowed, depending on the size of the dog.
- People should avoid direct contact with the baits if at all possible because wildlife are less likely to chew on the baits if they have human (or dog) scent on them.

The best protection against rabies for both domestic animals and people is to avoid contact with potentially rabid wildlife and to keep domestic animals up-to-date on rabies vaccination. **Rabies vaccination for dogs and cats is a regulatory requirement** in most of the province, including all of southern, central and eastern Ontario.

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario has recently revised its practice standards with regard to **rabies vaccination programs**. These programs can now be run in either accredited or unaccredited facilities under different conditions. These clinics can be very beneficial to the protection of public health by increasing access to rabies vaccinations for companion animals. Veterinarians in high-risk areas (including Hamilton and Haldimand-Norfolk) are encouraged to consider new options available for rabies vaccination programs for pets.

Links to the new Practice Standards for Rabies Programs, a Legislative Overview of Rabies for veterinarians and the online Application for Authorization of a Rabies Program are provided below.

### **Additional information for veterinarians:**

OMAFRA Rabies in Ontario website:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabies.htm>

OMNRF wildlife rabies control zone map (Decemebtr 16, 2015):

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabieszone.htm>

Rabies vaccine bait identification:

<http://www.ontario.ca/document/rabies-vaccine-bait-identification>

CVO Professional Practice Standards for Rabies Programs:

<http://cvo.org/CVO/media/College-of-Veterinarians-of-Ontario/Resources%20and%20Publications/Professional%20Practice%20Standards/PPSRabiesPrograms.pdf>

Legislative Overview of Rabies for veterinarians:

<http://cvo.org/CVO/media/College-of-Veterinarians-of-Ontario/Resources%20and%20Publications/Professional%20Practice%20Standards/LORabies.pdf>

Online Application for Authorization of a Rabies Program:

<http://cvo.org/Forms-Applications/Temporary-Facilities-Applications/Application-for-Authorization-of-a-Rabies-Program.aspx?ext>

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