



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein**

**August 26, 2013**

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### **RABIES VACCINE AIRDROP SCHEDULED IN ERIE & NIAGARA COUNTIES**

*Aerial Efforts Combat Incidence of Rabies in Raccoons, Other Wildlife*

**ERIE COUNTY, NY**— The Erie and Niagara County Departments of Health, in a cooperative effort with the Cornell University Animal Health Diagnostic Center, the New York State Department of Health, USDA/APHIS Wildlife Services, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, will be participating in a wildlife baiting rabies vaccination initiative to begin tentatively on August 26, 2013 and run through September 1. Rabies vaccine baits will be distributed by five fixed-wing aircraft over rural areas starting on August 26<sup>th</sup>, with a helicopter joining the force on August 28<sup>th</sup> to aid in distribution. This schedule may be adjusted slightly due to inclement weather conditions. All of Niagara County will be treated with vaccine, while the northern portion of Erie County will be included in the vaccination zone, bounded to the south (approximately) by State Route 354 and Seneca Street.

“Beginning August 26<sup>th</sup>, USDA and local agencies personnel will be distributing vaccine-laden baits by airplane and helicopter throughout Western New York as part of an aggressive action to halt the spread of rabies in wildlife, particularly raccoons,” **said Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein.**

“Rabies remains a very serious disease, and coordinated efforts such as this are a vital way to protect people and pets from contact with potentially rabid wildlife. In 2012, 42 animals from Erie County tested positive for rabies, predominantly raccoons but other animals as well. Vaccinating wildlife against rabies plays a vital role in decreasing the number of rabid wildlife and rabies exposures.”

**A TENTATIVE SCHEDULE has been set for the distribution of the rabies vaccine baits as follows:**

- **August 26, 2013: Five fixed-wing aircraft arrive at Genesee County Airport in Batavia; depending on time of day, bait distribution may commence over rural areas in WNY**
- **August 27, 2013: Fixed-wing bait distribution over rural areas**
- **August 28, 2013: Helicopter arrives at Prior Aviation in Buffalo to join distribution effort; depending on time of day, bait distribution may commence over residential areas; helicopter deployment is expected to continue for 4-5 days**

The baits and vaccines used for this operation are not harmful to people, pets, or wildlife. One type of vaccine, RABORAL V-RG, is contained in brown baits comprised of fishmeal, fish oil, and wax. A newer type, ONRAB, is contained in green baits comprised of vegetable shortening, wax, icing sugar, oil, and flavoring. The ONRAB vaccine has also shown promise in vaccinating skunks against rabies. In both baits, the vaccine chamber in the center of the bait breaks open when an animal bites into the bait, resulting in an oral rabies vaccination.

**Burstein continued,** “People should remember that these baits are not harmful to dogs, so if their dog picks one up, don’t risk getting bitten by trying to remove the bait from the pet’s mouth. Also, these baits will not attract raccoons to your property, but any raccoons that are already there will be attracted to the baits. It is a good idea to keep your dogs and cats on leashes when they are outside during this time, in order to keep the baits undisturbed for wild animals to eat. If you or your pet come into contact with bait, wash your hands and call 1-888-574-6656 to report the occurrence.”

If residents find baits, please do not disturb them. Studies have shown that most baits are eaten within four days, and almost all baits are gone within a week. If baits are not found and eaten, they will dissolve and expose the vaccine. Sunlight and exposure to air inactivates the vaccine.

**For more information, visit:**

The Erie County Department of Health at <http://www2.erie.gov/health/>

The Niagara County Department of Health at <http://www.niagaracounty.com/health/Home.aspx>

The New York State Department of Health at <http://www.health.ny.gov/>

USDA/APHIS Wildlife Services at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/oral\\_rabies/index.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/oral_rabies/index.shtml)

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