Questions and Answers: Rabies and Oral Rabies Vaccination

Q. What is rabies?

A. Rabies is a deadly virus that affects the central nervous system in mammals. Effective vaccines are available to prevent rabies in people, pets, and wildlife.

Q. How do you contract rabies?

A. The rabies virus is almost always spread through the bite of an infected animal.

Q. Why should I be worried about rabies in wildlife?

A. Rabies is a serious public health threat—if left untreated, it is always fatal. More than 90 percent of reported rabies cases in the United States are in wildlife. As human populations grow in suburban and rural areas, there is more interaction with wildlife. This increases the risk of rabies exposure for people and pets.

Q. How can I tell if an animal has rabies?

A. The visible signs of rabies may include any of the following: aggressive behavior, lethargy, confusion, attacking for no reason, acting tame, stumbling, or walking in a circle. Never approach a wild animal. If you have questions about wildlife, call the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Wildlife Services at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) or your State's wildlife agency.

Q. What should I do if an animal bites me?

A. Wash the wounds thoroughly with soap and water right away. Contact your local health department, your doctor, or hospital emergency room for medical guidance. If the bite came from a domestic animal, get the name and address of the animal's owner. If it came from a wild animal, contact animal control or a professional wildlife trapper to confine the animal.

Q. What should I do if I find a dead animal?

A. Call your local animal control office or USDA Wildlife Services (1-866-487-3297) for instructions. If you must move the animal, wear gloves or use a shovel to avoid direct contact. If the animal did not cause a rabies exposure (such as a bite, scratch, or contact with saliva), bury it in the ground at least 18 inches deep. If there was an exposure from the animal, put the carcass into a heavy plastic bag and place it in a cold area away from people and other animals. The area can be cleaned with 1 part bleach to 10 parts water.

Q. What can I do to prevent rabies?

A. There are many things you can do to protect yourself, your family, and pets from rabies:

- ☐ Stay away from wild animals.
- ☐ Vaccinate your pets against rabies per State and local laws.
- ☐ Don't touch, pick up, or relocate wild animals or stray domestic animals.
- ☐ Don't feed wild animals or make your yard inviting to them.
- ☐ Remove trash and secure garbage cans. Do not leave pet food outside.
- ☐ Keep family pets indoors at night. During the day, don't let them roam.
- ☐ Report unknown, strangely behaving, or deceased animals to your local animal control office or USDA Wildlife Services.

Oral Rabies Vaccination

Q. What's an oral rabies vaccination (ORV) bait, and what does it look like?

A. One type of ORV bait consists of a sachet or packet containing RABORAL V-RG® rabies vaccine. To make these baits attractive to wildlife, they are covered with fishmeal crumbs. A second type of ORV bait consists of a polyvinyl chloride (PVC) blister pack, containing the ONRAB rabies vaccine. This bait is coated with a sweet flavor (sugar/marshmallow) to make it attractive to wildlife.

(top right to bottom left) ONRAB blister pack, RABORAL V-RG® fishmeal polymer, RABORAL V-RG® coated sachet

Q. Can I get rabies from contact with the vaccine?

A. No. The vaccine cannot cause rabies.

Q. What if an ORV bait is found near my home?

A. It's best to leave it alone unless the bait is on your lawn, driveway, or other area where a child or pet might find it. In that case, move it to a wooded area or other location with thicker cover. Wear gloves or use a plastic bag or paper towel to protect your hands. If you need to dispose of the bait rather than move it, place the bait in a bag. Cover the bait with 1:10 dilution of household bleach, wipe down affected areas with the bleach solution, and place cleaning materials in the bag with the bait. You may then dispose of the bag in the regular trash. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water afterward.

Q. Why do I need to wear gloves when handling an ORV bait?

A. An intact bait won't harm you, but it's difficult to know if the bait may be leaking vaccine while on the ground. If you come into contact with the liquid vaccine contained within the bait, wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water and call the number listed on the bait or your county health department for further instructions.

Q. What if my dog or cat eats an ORV bait?

A. If your pet finds a bait, don't try to remove it from their mouth—you may get bitten. The vaccine cannot cause rabies and is safe if eaten by domestic dogs and cats. Eating a large number of baits may cause your pet to have an upset stomach temporarily, but there are no long-term health risks.

Q. How long do ORV baits last in the environment?

A. Most baits are eaten within 4 days, and almost all baits are gone in 1 week. Any remaining baits will dissolve in the environment, exposing the vaccine packet. Sunlight and air will inactivate the vaccine.

Q. Can I use the ORV bait to vaccinate my dog or cat?

A. No. These vaccines are only approved for use in wildlife. Your pet should be vaccinated by a veterinarian per State and local laws.

Q. How do raccoons or other wildlife get vaccinated by eating the ORV bait?

A. When an animal bites into the bait, the vaccine packet ruptures, allowing the animal to swallow the vaccine. Animals that receive an adequate dose of the vaccine develop antibodies against rabies.

Q. How long does the vaccine last?

A. On average, vaccination is effective for at least 1 year.

Q. How do you distribute ORV baits?

A. We work with States and other partners to distribute ORV baits using several methods, depending on the area. In rural or open areas, we use fixed-wing aircraft to disperse large numbers of baits; some residential or other populated areas may be baited by hand from vehicles. In urban and suburban areas, we use helicopters, hand baiting, and bait stations to place baits where wildlife are most likely to find them and reduce the chance that people or domestic animals will encounter them.

Learn More

Q. Where can I learn more about the National Rabies Management Program?

A. For general information, visit us online at www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/rabies.

Questions about rabies, the ORV program, or a bait you've found? Call us:

USDA Wildlife Services Rabies Information Line
1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297)

Alabama **State Department of Health**
1-800-151-1818

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