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SUFFOLK COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
NEWS RELEASE

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Suffolk County Rabies Baiting Program – July 2009
Oral Rabies Vaccine to be Distributed by Helicopter and Truck

Huntington, NY - In an effort to contain the spread of terrestrial rabies on Long Island and potentially eliminate the virus from local wildlife, the Suffolk County Department of Health Services, in cooperation with the New York State Department of Health, Cornell University and the United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services, will be distributing baits containing an oral rabies vaccine (ORV) in the Town of Huntington. The one-inch-square fish-meal baits and coated sachet baits will be distributed from both Suffolk County automobiles and a Police Department helicopter.

"The Rabies Baiting Program is a continuing countywide effort to eradicate raccoon terrestrial rabies by immunizing raccoons before they become infected and prevent the spread to other wildlife," said County Executive Steve Levy.

July presents the best opportunity to vaccinate the young raccoons that were born this past spring. Immunization occurs when raccoons, which are attracted to the fish-meal bait, consume the vaccine contained inside of the bait. Contact with the vaccine poses no health threat to humans or domestic animals.

From Monday, July 27, 2009, through Friday July 31, approximately 18,000 baits will be distributed by county vehicles in residential areas within the Town of Huntington. An additional 70,000 baits targeting wooded areas will be released by a Police Department helicopter, weather permitting. The baiting area extends from the north side of the Long Island Expressway (I-495) to the Long Island Sound and from the Nassau-Suffolk border eastward to Elwood Road.

To date, 18 rabid raccoons have been confirmed in Suffolk County since 2006, all in the northwestern portion of Huntington on the Nassau-Suffolk border. While only one rabid raccoon was identified countywide in 2009, there is a high probability that other raccoons are infected in this area.

A larger countywide oral rabies vaccination campaign is planned for the first week of September 2009, in conjunction with similar efforts in Nassau County, to provide additional protection to our human, domestic animal and wildlife populations.

According to Suffolk County Health Services Commissioner Dr. Humayun Chaudhry, "Rabies is fatal in unvaccinated animals and is a significant threat to the health of the wildlife, pet and human populations."

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The New York State and Suffolk County Departments of Health recommend the following actions be taken during this vaccination campaign:

- Supervise children outdoors both during and for one week following the bait distribution to avoid inadvertent contact with baits.
- Keep dogs and cats indoors or on leashes when outdoors both during and for one week following bait distribution to decrease the chance these pets will eat the vaccine.
- The baits are not harmful to dogs or cats, but may cause them to vomit if ingested in large numbers. Do not try to remove bait from an animal's mouth. **Whenever there is direct contact with the bait, contact the Suffolk County Public Health Hotline at 631-787-2200 or the toll-free number at 1-800-222-1222.**
- Call immediately in the unlikely event that a child bites through the packet and ingests the liquid.
- Wash hands immediately after bare-hand contact with the bait before making a call to report the exposure.
- It is important to remember that it is not possible to get rabies from the vaccine. The vaccine does not contain the rabies virus but does contain attenuated vaccinia virus.
- Residents are instructed not to move baits found near the home if the baits are not out in the open. These bait packets have a strong fishmeal odor that is not attractive to people and most other animals, and are clearly identified with the following label: "Rabies Vaccine Live Vaccinia Vector. Do Not Disturb, Merial, Inc Us Vet Lic. No. 298 1-877-722-6725.
- If bait is found intact and out in the open where pets or children may come in contact with it, residents are advised to wear gloves and toss the bait deeper into the bushes.

The Suffolk County Department of Health Services recommends the following precautions to protect yourself and your family from possible exposure to rabies:

- New York State and Suffolk County law requires that all dogs, cats and ferrets be vaccinated against rabies. Vaccinating your pet not only provides protection for the animal, but vaccinated pets act as a barrier to keep the rabies virus from spreading between wild animals and people.
- Do not have contact with any animal other than your own.
- Do not feed wildlife or stray animals and discourage them from seeking food near your home.
- Do not approach an unknown animal, either wild or domestic, especially if it is acting in an unusual way.
- Keep garbage cans tightly covered and avoid storing any food outside.
- Children should be advised to tell an adult immediately if they were bitten or scratched by any animal.
- To prevent the possible spread of the rabies virus, no one, including trappers and nuisance wildlife rehabilitators, should transport and relocate any wild animals at this time.

For more information on rabies, visit the New York State Department of Health website at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/rabies/rabies.htm>, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/>, or call the Suffolk County Department of Health Services Rabies Hotline at 631-787-2200 weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.