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### **For immediate release**

#### **Raccoon rabies vaccination set for August and September 2004**

Just as important as vaccinating children against many communicable diseases, West Virginia's raccoon population will receive its annual dose of rabies vaccinations. This year vaccine will be air dropped in 35 counties to create a barrier of immunized raccoons.

According to Jane Rooney, DVM, state public health veterinarian, the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health has been actively monitoring raccoons in the state since February 2001.

"Through active monitoring we found raccoon strain rabies in four counties where it had not been identified previously. It is imperative to identify exactly where raccoon strain rabies is so that the vaccine barrier can be placed appropriately," Rooney said.

In order to control the spread of raccoon rabies, a major source of rabies in West Virginia, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, in cooperation with local health departments, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will distribute vaccine-laced baits beginning in mid-August to help prevent alleviate the westward spread of rabies in the state.

Each vaccine-laced bait consists of a plastic sachet containing the vaccine inside the fish-meal polymer bait. The baits will be dropped along a corridor stretching more than 30 miles in width throughout a large portion of the state.

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## **Rabies drop**

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Each bait will contain a toll-free number printed on its side so that anyone finding the bait can obtain information by calling the designated number. Residents are once again reminded to leave baits alone and to keep pets confined during the baiting period. In particular, dogs are attracted to the baits and will occasionally eat them. The baits are not harmful to pets. Do not try to take a bait away from your pet. Please keep the following information in mind:

- Know what the bait looks like. They are 1.25 x 1.25 x .75 inches in size, brown and square in shape. The vaccine packet is inside a hard fishmeal polymer shell.
- Instruct children to leave the baits alone.
- Keep dogs and cats inside or on leashes at least a week after your area is baited. It is important that raccoons have every opportunity to eat the baits.
- Do not attempt to take a bait away from your pet; you may be bitten.
- If baits are found in areas frequented by pets or children, toss them into deeper cover. Damaged baits can be disposed of in trash. It is recommended that anyone handling baits wear gloves.
- If a person is exposed to the actual vaccine (red liquid), wash with soap and water any areas of the skin that came into contact with the vaccine.

For more information: call your local health department or the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources at 1-800-423-1271.