



DATE: February 17, 2005
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New Program Designed to Prevent Spread of Rabies in Wild Animals

Oral Vaccines to be Distributed throughout Broward County in March

At a news conference this morning, Broward County Mayor Kristin Jacobs announced a new program to curb the spread of rabies among raccoons in Broward County.

The Oral Rabies Vaccine Program (ORVP) is a five-year effort initiated by the Broward County Board of County Commissioners to vaccinate raccoons against rabies through oral vaccines. The ultimate goal of the program is to lower the incidence of rabies among raccoons and reduce the threat of rabies to residents and their pets.

"We're trying to reduce and prevent the spread of rabies in Broward County," Mayor Jacobs said. "The Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved this program to protect Broward County residents, their families and pets and our wildlife."

With 30 rabies cases confirmed in Broward County since July 2000, controlling the spread of rabies among wild animals is increasingly important. The primary rabies threat in Broward County comes from raccoons.

To administer the vaccine to raccoons, bait made of fish meal will be used. The oral vaccine, called Raboral V-RG®, is placed inside small pouches contained in each piece of bait. When an animal bites into the bait, the pouch breaks and a dose of rabies vaccine is released.

County government agencies will begin distributing the baits starting on Wednesday, March 2. The distribution of the bait will take several weeks. The program will continue through 2009, with baiting scheduled to take place in February or March each year.

More than 200,000 pieces of bait will be distributed throughout the county in areas dense with wildlife, including many County parks, from Palm Beach County line to the Miami-Dade County line and from the ocean to the conservation areas. Most of the bait will be distributed by hand by teams of County workers. Broward Sheriff's Office helicopters will also drop the bait in sparsely populated areas of the County.

The oral vaccine is not dangerous to people, pets or livestock, and people cannot contract the rabies virus from the oral vaccine even if it is ingested. However, residents are urged to avoid direct contact with exposed vaccine and to supervise children and pets when they are outside to keep them from eating or touching the bait. Animals that

eat too many pieces of the bait may suffer vomiting or diarrhea from the rich fish meal, not from the vaccine.

The ORVP is modeled after similar successful oral rabies vaccination programs in the United States, Europe and Canada. Fifteen states currently use oral vaccines for raccoons, while Texas distributes baits for gray foxes and coyotes.

Broward County's ORVP is a cooperative effort between local, state and federal government agencies. At the local level, the Broward County Animal Care and Regulation Division is leading this effort with the assistance of other county agencies. State agencies participating in the program include: Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, State Department of Health Broward County Health Department and the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The United States Department of Agriculture is participating at the federal level.

The ORVP is a first important element to prevent rabies of Broward County's overall Rabies Prevention Campaign. The most effective way for residents to protect themselves against rabies is to ensure their pets receive an annual rabies vaccination.

County law requires cats and dogs four months and older to receive an annual rabies vaccination and to wear a County animal license tag. The license tag serves as proof that a pet has been vaccinated against rabies, and it provides additional identification if the pet becomes lost.

The Broward County Animal Care and Regulation Division also offers a series of low-cost rabies vaccination clinics. Qualified pet owners who meet certain low-income requirements can have their dog or cat vaccinated for as little as \$15. More details on the clinics, including dates and locations, are available online at www.broward.org/animal.

For more information on the ORVP or on general rabies prevention efforts, visit www.broward.org/animal. For more information on the rabies virus, visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies.

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