For Immediate Release

Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) distribution expanded in Monongalia County

MORGANTOWN, WV (July 26, 2019) — Monongalia County is back in the zone. The line where Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) baits were dropped had been moved west of most of Monongalia County in the past few years. However, during this year’s ORV drop conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) between Aug. 22 to Sept. 5, most of the county has been added back into the ORV zone.

Dr. Lee B. Smith of Monongalia County Health Department hopes this will help reduce the incidence of rabies that has been occurring in the area, but he noted that the ORV must be dropped annually to make a real difference.

“The efforts of baiting need to be sustained in order to be effective,” said Dr. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer. “We are very grateful that the USDA has revamped their ORV program. To be effective, however, this ORV must be continued yearly.”

ORV baits will be dropped by plane over rural areas and distributed by hand in more populated areas, especially targeting areas where rabid wildlife has been found. About 49,000 baits will be dropped in Monongalia County, according to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), based in Elkins. Oral Rabies Vaccine and bait are not considered to be dangerous. The bait coating is made of dog food or fishmeal and poses no danger to human or animal health.

People who might happen upon the baits should leave them alone, unless they are in an area where children or pets play. To move an ORV bait, wear gloves or use a paper towel or plastic bag, according to information released by USDAAPHIS. Move baits to areas where wildlife might find them. If a pet eats a bait, it is not harmful, but eating several could cause an upset stomach. Wash your hands after touching a bait.
Rabies is a viral disease found in mammals that attacks the nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain and death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov).

A total of 14 rabid raccoons have been found in Monongalia County this year. Five of those were the result of a family pet interacting with raccoons that were found to be positive for rabies. The other nine raccoons that tested positive for rabies were identified thanks to the efforts of surveillance conducted by USDA APHIS.

When a raccoon with rabies gets into a fight with a family dog, cat or other pet that is a mammal, that animal must be re-vaccinated for rabies and observed, or quarantined, depending on the situation. Pets that have not been vaccinated for rabies might have to be euthanized after encountering a rabid animal.

Sometimes family members who interact with their pets and come in contact with blood and/or saliva also must undergo rabies prophylactic post-exposure treatment.

Under West Virginia law, all animal bites are to be reported and MCHD Environmental Health works to control rabies and other vector-borne diseases. Monongalia County Health Department also works to educate the community on the presence of rabies, the need to avoid wildlife and to take common-sense precautions with pets. These include making sure dogs, cats and ferrets are up to date on rabies vaccines and monitoring them if they are outdoors to keep them away from wildlife.

“We are working in conjunction with our community, county and federal partners to improve awareness regarding rabies, as well as public safety and a sustainable ORV program,” Dr. Smith said. “We know that some wildlife in Monongalia County, as well as in West Virginia, are infected with rabies virus.”

In addition to raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats are common rabies carriers in West Virginia.

“This is why we advise people to leave wildlife alone, have their animals vaccinated, and do not handle without precautions pets that may have been injured in fights with other animals,” Dr. Smith said. “Also, if there is concern, seek attention by a medical provider knowledgeable of rabies and who is equipped to begin treatment if necessary.”

For information on what to do in the case of a wildlife encounter, go to monchd.org/rabies-control.html. Check out monchd.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at WVMCHD for up-to-date information on health and wellness in the community.

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