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MEDIA ADVISORY: USDA Increases Surveillance to Combat Wildlife Rabies

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife will increase surveillance of sick and strange-acting animals in eastern Ohio beginning this month. USDA seeks the public's help as it works to determine the frequency of rabies in eastern Ohio raccoons. Anyone who encounters a raccoon that is sick-acting or behaving unusually is asked to avoid all contact but to report the animal.

Increased rabies surveillance in eastern Ohio is underway because of a recent rabies-positive raccoon in Stark County. The case is the first reported rabid raccoon in Stark County, and Wildlife Services wants to determine whether the disease is spreading in Ohio raccoons.

Citizens in Stark, Carroll, and Tuscarawas Counties are asked to report any dead raccoons, including those struck by vehicles, or live raccoons acting in an unusual way. In towns and suburbs, seeing raccoons during the day is not unusual. Any raccoon, however, that appears to be overly friendly or unafraid, or appears sick (staggering, unsteady or aggressive) should be reported. Signs suggestive of rabies include unusual, aggressive or calm and "friendly" behavior, an inability to eat or drink, balance problems, circling, seizures, coma and finally death.

Calls should be made to Wildlife Services in Ohio at 330-726-3386 or to your local county health department. USDA biologists or specialists will respond and remove the animal or carcass to test it for rabies.

Rabies is caused by a virus that infects the central nervous system in mammals and represents a serious public health concern. If exposures to the virus are not treated it is almost always fatal. Costs associated with detection, prevention and control of rabies exceed \$300 million annually in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 90 percent of reported rabies cases in the U.S. are in wildlife. People are urged not to make contact with or feed wildlife and to keep their pets' rabies vaccinations current.

As part of the USDA National Rabies Management Program, oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits have been distributed through aerial drops and by hand in the eastern portion of the state since 1997 in partnership with state and local public health agencies and others. The program seeks to create a barrier and prevent the westward spread of the raccoon variant of rabies. The area baited in Ohio may be expanded in the 2017 summer campaign to include portions of

Carroll, Stark, and Tuscarawas counties. The normal target area includes portions of Ashtabula, Belmont, Columbiana, Geauga, Harrison, Jefferson, Lake, Mahoning, Monroe, Portage, Summit, and Trumbull counties.

For more information, contact your local health department by calling 330-493-9904 in Stark County; 330-627-4866 in Carroll County, and 330-343-5555 in Tuscarawas County.

For more information about the National Rabies Management Program, visit:
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/programs/nrmp>

For more information on what to do if you encounter sick or injured wildlife in Ohio, visit: <http://wildlife.ohiodnr.gov/species-and-habitats/orphaned-and-injured-wildlife>

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