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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**For More Information:**

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**Spring Rabies Vaccine Bait Distribution Planned for Parts of Essex County, NY**

Elizabethtown, NY. The Essex County Health Department (ECHD) is advising residents that the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS) recently announced it will conduct a spring distribution of oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits in May 2026 across New York State. Annual baiting helps control the spread of raccoon-variant rabies and protects community health, pets, and wildlife.

During the operation, fixed wing aircraft may be observed distributing small, fish-scented baits in wooded areas, fields, and other habitats frequented by wildlife. These baits contain a vaccine proven safe for many species and pose minimal risk to people and pets.

**Key Points About the Operation**

- **Timing:** Beginning on or after May 6, 2026, with exact dates varying by location and weather conditions.
- **Areas Covered:** Selected zones in New York State, including a northeastern portion of Essex County.
- **Purpose:** To maintain a protective barrier and prevent further spread of raccoon-variant rabies.
- **Safety:** The vaccine inside each bait has been extensively tested and is safe for wildlife. If found, baits should be left undisturbed whenever possible.

**What To Do If You Find a Rabies Vaccine Bait**

If a bait is discovered in your yard or on your property:

- Leave the bait where you found it whenever possible.
- If the bait is in an area where kids or pets are, use gloves or a plastic bag to pick it up and place it in a nearby wooded area.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling.

**If a Pet Comes Into Contact with a Bait**

- Eating the bait is **not harmful** to dogs or cats, though the fish meal coating may cause mild stomach upset in some pets.
- Do not attempt to retrieve a bait from a pet’s mouth; you could get bitten.

**If a Person Comes Into Contact with a Bait**

- Brief contact with an intact bait is typically not harmful. Wash hands with soap and water.
- If the vaccine packet inside the bait is punctured and the liquid comes into contact with skin, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water.



DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH- Linda Beers, MPH  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH PROMOTION &  
PLANNING- Jessica Darney Buehler, MPH

"Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms appear, but it is preventable," said Linda Beers, Director of Public Health for ECHD. "We have several tools for prevention, including free rabies vaccine clinics for dogs, cats, and ferrets; prompt investigation and treatment when animal bites or exposures occur; and outreach and education to increase awareness and vigilance. These bait drops are another tool that helps reduce risk for people, pets, and wildlife across our region."

"Ongoing communication and information sharing, such as provided by our department and local USDA contacts, supports planning for bait drops," explained Jessica Darney Buehler, Director of Health Planning & Promotion for ECHD. "This spring drop is a higher density of baits than historically used for later summer drops, with the goal of targeting where recent cases have been identified," noted Buehler.

Residents with questions about the bait distribution or concerns about possible exposure should contact the Essex County Health Department at 518-873-3500.

More information about rabies prevention can be viewed on the ECHD website at:  
<https://health.essexcountyny.gov/communicable-disease-control/rabies-center/>

To learn more about rabies bait drops, go to: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/national-wildlife-programs/rabies>

To view the 2026 Rabies Clinic Schedule and register your pets, go to:  
<https://health.essexcountyny.gov/rabies-clinics/>

The next opportunity to vaccinate your pets for free is Thursday, May 7 from 6-7:30PM at the Jay Fire Department.

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