



March 16, 2026

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Wildlife
Services

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Dear Cooperator:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Wildlife Services program (WS) will distribute oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits in southwestern Virginia to vaccinate raccoons against the rabies virus. Bait distribution in Virginia is part of a nationwide, cooperative effort by USDA to prevent the westward spread of raccoon rabies in the eastern United States. The baiting program is being conducted in part to abate an emergency human health and safety rabies issue. Implementation of this program in Virginia is a cooperative effort between USDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and other state agencies. The spring 2026 bait distribution is the twenty-second annual baiting in southwestern Virginia.

Beginning on or about April 13, 2026, ORV baits will be distributed via fixed wing aircraft and helicopters in southwestern Virginia. The April bait distribution project is expected to last approximately one week. The baits will be distributed throughout a vaccination area that includes parts of the following counties/cities: Bland, Giles, Grayson, Smyth, Russell, Washington, Wythe, Tazewell, Bristol, and Abingdon. In total, approximately 216,000 coated sachet baits containing the oral rabies vaccine will be distributed across 4,280 square-kilometer bait zone in southwestern Virginia. (Maps of ORV zone included)

As the ORV baits are aurally distributed, a navigator controls the bait machine and turns off the machine as necessary to avoid dropping baits on roadways, structures, large bodies of water, etc. The ORV baits which will be distributed are “coated sachets.” The coated sachet is a plastic packet of vaccine coated with a sticky, scented substance to attract raccoons. Each bait is marked with a toll-free number (1-877-722-6725) for people to call for assistance or information if they find or come in contact with a bait.



Oral Rabies Vaccine coated sachet.

In mid-April 2026 USDA personnel will also distribute approximately 15,600 coated sachet oral rabies vaccine baits by helicopter in suburban and developed areas within the bait zone.

We recommend the following precautions in case ORV baits are found by persons or pets:

- If your pet finds an ORV bait, do not attempt to remove the bait from your pet's mouth, as you could be bitten. Eating the baits will not harm your pet.
- Confine your pet and look for other baits in the area. These baits should be removed from areas where your pet could eat them.
- Instruct children to leave baits alone.
- Wear gloves or use a towel when you pick up the bait. Although there is no harm in touching an undamaged bait, they have a strong fishmeal smell. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water if there is any chance that the vaccine sachet has been ruptured.
- If a person or pet is exposed to the vaccine contained within the bait, call the toll-free number on the bait (1-877-722-6725) to report the bait contact.

Please contact the USDA WS at (540) 230-7067 if you have any questions about the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program. Enclosed is a map of the April 2026 bait distribution zone. Additional information is also available from the website:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage/rabies>

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important public health effort.

Sincerely,



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