



HEALTH DISTRICT

## Portage County Combined General Health District

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Media Release  
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### **Rabies Vaccine Baiting Scheduled in Portage County: April 18 – May 13, 2026**

The Portage County Health District is notifying residents that the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services (USDA APHIS WS), will begin distributing oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits to help prevent the spread of rabies in wildlife.

Beginning **Saturday, April 18, 2026**, vaccine baits will be distributed by ground, helicopter, and fixed-wing aircraft to immunize wild raccoons and other rabies vector species, including skunks, foxes, and coyotes. Weather permitting, the operation is expected to be completed by **May 13, 2026**.

Baiting will occur across several eastern Ohio counties, including **Ashtabula, Belmont, Carroll, Columbiana, Harrison, Jefferson, Mahoning, Portage, and Trumbull counties**, as well as the cities of **Ashtabula, Belle Vista/Austintown, Boardman, Conneaut, Edgewood, Geneva, Hubbard, Lisbon, Niles, Poland, Struthers, Warren, and Youngstown**.

This effort is part of a coordinated statewide and federal initiative to protect public health by preventing the spread of rabies from wildlife to domestic animals and humans.

#### **About the Vaccine Baits**

The vaccine baits are approximately the size of a matchbox and are coated with a fishmeal or sweet vanilla scent to attract wildlife. While exposure incidents are rare, residents are encouraged to be aware of the baits and follow safety guidance if encountered.

#### **How the Oral Rabies Vaccine Works**

The oral rabies vaccine (ORV) is contained inside a small blister packet that is coated with an attractant to encourage wildlife to consume it. When an animal such as a raccoon, skunk, fox, or coyote bites into the bait, the blister pack is punctured and the vaccine is released into the animal's mouth.

The vaccine is absorbed through the oral cavity and tonsils, stimulating the animal's immune system to produce antibodies against rabies. This helps protect the animal from future exposure to the rabies virus.

Importantly, the vaccine cannot cause rabies. It safely exposes the immune system to a component of the virus, allowing the animal to build protection and respond quickly if exposed in the future.

## **What to Do If You Find a Bait**

Baits should be left undisturbed unless they are located in areas where children or pets may come into contact with them. Intact baits can be safely moved if necessary, and damaged baits should be bagged and disposed of in the trash.

- Wear gloves or use a paper towel when picking up the bait
- Toss intact baits into a fence row, woodlot, ditch, or other appropriate wildlife habitat
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling baits

Contact with intact baits is not harmful. As a precaution, individuals who are immunocompromised or pregnant should contact a healthcare provider if a bait ruptures and vaccine comes into contact with a mucous membrane or open wound.

## **If Your Pet Encounters a Bait**

Ingesting the vaccine will not harm your pet; however, consuming a large number of baits may temporarily cause vomiting or diarrhea. It is recommended to consult a veterinarian as a precaution if your pet has consumed ORV bait.

- Do not attempt to remove a bait from your pet's mouth, as this may put you at risk of being bitten
- Confine your pet and check the area for additional baits; if found, relocate them using gloves to an area less accessible to people and pets where wildlife are more likely to find them
- Avoid contact with your pet's saliva for 24 hours and wash any skin or wounds that may have been licked
- Vaccinating your pets remains critical in preventing rabies; the ORV bait is intended for wildlife only. Consult your veterinarian to ensure your pet's vaccinations are current

## **Exposure Information**

There is no exposure risk when handling an intact bait. If the vaccine packet is punctured and liquid is visible:

- Wash hands and any exposed skin thoroughly with soap and water
- Seek medical attention if symptoms such as rash, fever, sore throat, headache, eye irritation, vomiting, or diarrhea develop within 21 days of exposure

## **Enhanced Rabies Surveillance**

In addition to bait distribution, USDA APHIS WS continues to conduct enhanced rabies surveillance across eastern Ohio. This includes testing wildlife such as raccoons and other rabies vector species to detect and respond to rabies activity early.

Local health departments, including the Portage County Health District, play an important role in supporting these efforts through specimen collection and coordination with state and federal partners.

## **Additional Information**

Residents can find more information, including bait descriptions and maps, by visiting the Ohio Department of Health Oral Rabies Vaccination Campaign website.

For questions:

- USDA Wildlife Services: (330) 726-3386
- Ohio Department of Health Zoonotic Disease Program: 614-752-1029 or [zoonoses@odh.ohio.gov](mailto:zoonoses@odh.ohio.gov)
- Ohio Department of Health Rabies Information Line: 1-888-574-6656
- Portage County Health District: 330-296-9919

## **About Rabies**

Rabies is a viral disease that affects both animals and humans and is almost always fatal once symptoms appear. It is spread through the saliva of infected animals, typically through bites or scratches.

The best protection against rabies includes:

- Avoiding contact with wild or unfamiliar animals
- Vaccinating pets and keeping vaccinations up to date

If you are bitten, contact your healthcare provider. If your pet has contact with a wild animal, contact your veterinarian immediately.

## **About the Portage County Health District**

The Portage County Health District is committed to promoting health, preventing disease, and protecting the well-being of those who live, work, and learn in Portage County through education, prevention programs, and strong community partnerships. Learn more at [www.portagehealth.net](http://www.portagehealth.net).

## **Media Contact**

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