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Raccoon Rabies Prevention

WILD ANIMAL VACCINATION IN ESTRIE AND MONTÉRÉGIE,
AND IN PARKS IN THE MONTREAL REGION

Québec City, August 18, 2016 – Starting on August 20, the Québec Government will launch an operation to spread vaccine baits in Montérégie, Estrie and the Greater Montreal area, with the aim of maintaining and enhancing immunity against rabies among raccoon, skunk and fox populations. The bait will be spread manually or by air, depending on the area concerned.

From August 20 to 26 inclusively, low-flying aircraft will therefore be present in an area of roughly 3,500 km², mainly over woodland, to drop approximately 380,000 vaccine baits. A total of 68 municipalities in Montérégie and the Eastern Townships will be covered.

Baits will also be spread manually from August 22 to September 16, mostly on farmland and close to homes, in spots where raccoons, skunks or foxes may be concealed. Teams from the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs will cover an area of nearly 4,000 km² in 89 municipalities in Montérégie and Estrie and in nine parks in the Greater Montreal region. They will distribute roughly 246,000 vaccine baits in the natural habitats of raccoons, skunks and foxes, mainly in wooded areas, areas adjacent to watercourses, and occasionally, areas around garbage cans.

The vaccine baits resemble large, olive-green ravioli. They measure roughly 40 mm by 22 mm by 10 mm. Because of their colour, they blend into the environment and are difficult to spot on the ground. They are also very strong, since they are designed to withstand the impact of an air drop. Vaccine baits must be perforated to release the liquid vaccine; this occurs when they are bitten by a wild animal.

Current status

The Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs has maintained intensive surveillance activities since the spring of this year, and brought its control activities forward following the discovery, in 2015, of a rabid raccoon in the Québec portion of the Akwesasne Aboriginal reserve. This case was part of a rabies outbreak in northern New York State in 2015, when a total of 15 rabid animals were detected near the Québec border. More than half these cases were discovered within 5 km of the border. To avoid the possibility of new cases of the disease in Québec this year, a wild animal vaccination operation was held in April, when teams of professional trappers coordinated by the MFFP spread vaccine baits by hand in target species habitats in 26 municipalities of Montérégie and Estrie. The risk that the disease will be reintroduced into Québec in 2016 is real, and the public health issues are significant because rabies is fatal to humans. Surveillance and vaccination operations will therefore continue, to ensure that there are no further outbreaks of the disease in Québec.
Instructions for citizens

To ensure the success of these operations, citizens in the regions concerned are asked to comply with the following instructions:

- **Report disoriented, paralyzed, abnormally aggressive or dead raccoons, skunks and foxes by calling 1 877 346-6763 or by completing the online form at rageduratlonlaveur.gouv.qc.ca.**
- Avoid handling vaccine baits, even though they are considered safe for people, pets and the environment.
- If you come into contact with perforated or broken baits, please call the number on the back of the bait or dial 811 to contact Info-Santé.
- Do not trap and relocate wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes or any other mammal), to avoid spreading the disease to another region.

Citizens should also bear in mind the following guidelines at all times:

- Never approach an unknown animal, whether wild or domesticated.
- See a vet to have pet animals vaccinated against rabies.
- Place outdoor garbage containers out of reach of animals.
- If you are bitten or scratched, or if you come into contact with animal saliva, clean the wound, however small it may be, for 10 minutes using soap and water, and contact Info-Santé immediately by dialling 811, to obtain medical assistance if necessary.
- Consult a vet if your pet is bitten by or comes into contact with a wild animal.

About the Raccoon Rabies Prevention Plan

Raccoon rabies prevention operations are managed by an inter-ministerial committee composed of representatives from the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the public health departments of the Eastern Townships, Montérégie and Montreal, the Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation, the regional public safety and fire departments of Montérégie and the Eastern Townships, and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the Université de Montréal.

For further information on raccoon rabies prevention operations in Québec and rabies in general, or to report a dead or suspect animal, please visit rageduratlonlaveur.gouv.qc.ca.

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