Dear Colleague,

This is a reminder that the province is continuing its annual wildlife rabies control operations for 2007. The trap-vaccinate-release programs have been underway since the beginning of July and aerial vaccine baiting will begin in mid-August.

This ministry is committed to the research, control and eradication of rabies in Ontario, thereby protecting the health and safety of the public, their pets and the wildlife of this province. Our programs are so successful that broad areas of southern Ontario are free of fox and raccoon rabies.

A person exposed to rabies should receive treatment without delay. If there is a delay in treatment and symptoms appear, the disease is fatal.

We use a number of control measures in the fight against the rabies virus:
- control measures at the point of infection (may be implemented when a new case is confirmed),
- trap-vaccinate-release programs (beginning in July); and
- widespread aerial vaccine baiting (beginning in August) and limited ground baiting in urban areas (beginning in July)

Since 1989, we have been distributing oral rabies vaccine baits targeting foxes and raccoons (since 1999) on a large-scale in Ontario. When ingested, these baits immunize the targeted species against rabies. Our efforts have focused mainly on foxes as foxes have been the main rabies host in Ontario since the late 1950’s. Our efforts have been so successful that fox rabies cases have decreased by 98%; there were only 40 fox strain rabies cases in 2006, down from an average of 1,500 annually before control measures were implemented. In most areas, when rabid foxes have been eliminated by our baiting programs, a decrease of rabid skunks soon followed. This has not happened in certain areas of south-western Ontario where remnant pockets of rabid skunks carrying and transmitting the fox variant of rabies persist.

As part of our research and control efforts, we will be distributing a new oral rabies vaccine for skunks in selected regions of Grey, Dufferin and Wellington counties beginning on August 13th. This research is directed to eliminating the remaining pocket of rabid skunks in south-western Ontario.

We will also be distributing oral rabies vaccine baits for raccoons in southeastern Ontario on Wolfe Island. It is necessary to continue rabies control programs when rabies incidence is low so that healthy wildlife populations are not infected by the remaining rabid animals. In jurisdictions such as neighbouring New York State, which did not have proactive, multi-partner programs, the number of raccoon rabies cases had climbed to more than 8000 in the initial six-year period. Ontario’s MNR-led program is so effective that, in the first seven years, only 132 cases of raccoon rabies have been confirmed (as of July 11, 2007). The last confirmed raccoon rabies case in Ontario occurred in 2005 and our raccoon rabies control program has adjusted appropriately.

One of the reasons for Ontario’s success in controlling the spread of raccoon rabies is attributable to the introduction of a high-risk area in eastern Ontario. The boundaries of the high-risk area were reduced by approximately 65% in 2005 due to our successful efforts to control raccoon rabies. The boundaries are based on the location of cases for the previous two years and remain unchanged from 2006.

In the high-risk area, people are encouraged not to move or relocate raccoons, foxes or skunks. These animals may only be relocated to a maximum of 1 km from their point of capture. This is intended to stop the spread of the disease.

Beginning on July 23rd, staff and volunteers will be hand distributing vaccine baits throughout the river ravine systems in Toronto. This control measure is occurring as a result of four rabid skunks in the Bolton area (north of Toronto) in the spring of 2006. The remainder of the baits for this area will be distributed by helicopter in late August. From mid-August to mid-September, baits targeting foxes will be distributed throughout southwestern Ontario.

The rabies control program is a joint effort that receives important input from a variety of partners across Ontario. Regional health units, municipalities, wildlife rehabilitators, licensed trappers, wildlife control agents and aboriginal communities are all key to the continued success of Ontario’s world-renowned rabies control program.

Included in this information package is:
1) Map of rabies control operations for 2007
2) Map of Raccoon Rabies High Risk Area
3) Rabies Vaccine Bait Fact Sheet
4) Protect Your Family Fact Sheet

For further information about rabies prevention and control operations and to view updated maps, visit the Rabies in Ontario web site at http://rabies.mnr.gov.on.ca or call our rabies hotline at 1-888-574-6656.

Sincerely,

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