

July 31, 2017

HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH WILD AND STRAY ANIMALS



Contact:

Emily Cason

emily.cason@flhealth.gov

904-875-6100

Fernandina Beach, Fla. — The Florida Department of Health in Nassau County (DOH-Nassau) urges residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure.

In Florida, raccoons, bats, foxes, and unvaccinated cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals that are at high risk for rabies include skunks, otters, coyotes, bobcats, and stray or unvaccinated dogs and ferrets. There have recently been increased reports of coyote sightings in urban settings in Nassau County, which warrants caution and awareness as these animals can be infected with rabies and can potentially expose people and pets. In the past three years, Nassau County has received reports of one raccoon, one cat, and one fox that tested positive for rabies.

“Rabies is a potentially fatal disease. It is important not to handle wild animals, to be aware of unusual acting animals, and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies,” said Dr. Eugenia Ngo-Seidel, Director, DOH-Nassau.

Rabies is transmitted through exposure to the saliva and nervous tissue from a rabid animal through a bite, scratch, or contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth. DOH-Nassau works with Nassau County Animal Services and the Nassau Humane Society in responding to incidents of animal bites, tests animals for rabies through the Department of Health state laboratory, and quarantines animals as necessary. DOH-Nassau also provides rabies vaccinations to victims of animal bites, the only known effective treatment for rabies prevention in humans.

The following are steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones against rabies:

- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood. Nassau Humane Society is the animal control agency for the City of Fernandina Beach, and Nassau County Animal Services is the agency for all other parts of the county.
- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Nassau County Animal Services at 904-530-6150, or the Nassau Humane Society at 904-491-0122 for incidents in the city of Fernandina Beach.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.

- Outdoor feeding can attract animals such as feral cats, raccoons, and coyotes. Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets.

Unusual acting animals should be reported to the Nassau Humane Society at 904-491-0122 in the city of Fernandina Beach, or to Nassau County Animal Services at 904-530-6150 for those in other areas of the county. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by a wild animal or stray should report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as their local animal control agency and DOH-Nassau. To report an animal bite to DOH-Nassau call 904-875-6100.

For further information on rabies, visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

Follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyFla](#) and on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.

###