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



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Yulee, Fla. — 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 and 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. Each year, Nassau County receives reports of rabid animals. In 2016, one rabid animal was reported in Nassau County. Most recently, one fox with exposure to one person were reported in May 2016.

“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, FDOH-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 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:

- 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.
- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- **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 Nassau County Animal Services at 904-530-6150 for handling. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as Nassau County Animal Services and their local health department. To report an animal bite to DOH-Nassau call 904-530-6825.

For further information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>, or contact DOH-Nassau at 904-530-6825

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