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TAKE PRECAUTIONS WHEN SHARING YOUR HOME WITH ANIMALS

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Pensacola, Fla. –The Florida Department of Health in Escambia County advises residents to be aware of the health risks associated with house pets, particularly when keeping exotic animals. Sharing a home with any animal comes with some risk of disease or injury. Certain animals are known transmitters of bacteria or viruses that can be harmful to humans. Examples include reptiles, yard and water fowl, monkeys, racoons, bats, and even dogs and cats.

The many illnesses that can be transmitted from animal to human include E. coli 0157, Salmonella, and rabies. Germs such as Salmonella and E. coli are always on the animals' bodies and in their droppings, even when they appear clean and healthy. Rabies is a concern with animal bites for both wild animals and house pets. "Keeping your pets' rabies vaccine up-to-date minimizes the risk of rabies contraction and the need for rabies testing in the case of a bite," says FDOH-Escambia's director, Dr. John Lanza. "Do not feed or touch wild or stray animals."

Before deciding to keep any animal as a pet:

- Take time to learn about disease risks associated with that animal and what can be done to minimize them. Ask a veterinarian about disease risks associated with the animal, recommended vaccinations, and any other precautions to be aware of.
- If you have a medical condition that may be impacted by having a pet or are immune compromised, discuss your pet choice and associated risks with your doctor.
- Research licensure requirements and any laws, ordinances, or regulations that may relate to keeping that animal.
- Do not give an animal as a gift without discussing these concerns with the recipient or their caregiver.

Other precautions to take with animals include:

- Wash your hands after handling any animal, especially before preparing food and drinks or eating/drinking.
- Supervise young children around animals, or consider keeping them away from animals, especially those of unknown temperament and vaccination status. Do not let children put hands or objects (such as pacifiers, water bottles, etc.) into their mouth while with an animal. Wash their hands afterward.
- Clean counter and table surfaces before preparing or consuming food and drinks.
- Do NOT share food with, or eat or drink from the same dishware or utensils, as an animal.
- Avoid adopting or having contact with any animal that could be wild.

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