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PROTECT AGAINST ANIMAL BITES, RABIES AWARENESS



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Pensacola, Fla. – Warmer weather means wandering wild and stray animals. The Florida Department of Health in Escambia County (FDOH-Escambia) urges residents and visitors to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure by avoiding contact with wild and stray animals.

About Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease that infects the central nervous system. Without proper treatment, rabies can cause brain infection and death. Rabies is transmitted by a rabid animal by a bite, a scratch, or by contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth. A series of “rabies shots” can protect a bite victim from developing the rabies infection, if given soon after the bite occurs.

“Rabies is a fatal infection but is preventable,” notes FDOH-Escambia’s Administrator and Health Officer, Marie Mott. “It is important to not feed or pet wild and stray animals, to avoid animals that appear to be acting strangely, and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies. Persons who are bitten by a wild animal or an animal who has not been vaccinated against rabies should seek immediate medical care. Proper medical treatment of an animal bite can be life-saving.”

In Florida, raccoons, foxes, bats, and cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals that are at high risk for rabies include dogs, bobcats, skunks, and otters. Because of their proximity to people, stray and unvaccinated cats and dogs pose a special risk.

Reduce Risks for Rabies Transmission and Exposure

Residents and visitors are advised to maintain the following precautions:

- Vaccinate pets against rabies and keep vaccinations up to date.
- Keep pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If a pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately.
- Bring in pet food at night and secure trash cans with fasteners, or place trash containers in the garage, so they do not attract wild or stray animals.
- 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.
- Call animal control services to remove any stray domestic animals from your neighborhood; for wild animals, contact a private wildlife removal specialist.
- 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.

- Persons who have been bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals should seek medical attention and report the injury to the Florida Department of Health in Escambia County at 850-595-6700.

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About the Florida Department of Health

The Florida Department of Health, 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.

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