

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 11, 2018

RABIES ADVISORY: FLORIDA HEALTH IN BREVARD URGES RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH WILD AND STRAY ANIMALS



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Rockledge, FL - The Florida Department of Health in Brevard County (DOH-Brevard) 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, Brevard receives reports of rabid animals. In 2018, 4 rabid animals including 3 raccoons and 1 bat were reported in Brevard. Most recently, a raccoon with exposure to one person was reported in July 2018.

"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 Maria Stahl, DNP, RN, Health Officer FDOH Brevard County.

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-Brevard works with Brevard County Sheriff's Office 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-Brevard 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 and at-risk livestock.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. Follow leash laws by keeping pets and livestock secured on your property. If your pet or livestock are bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Brevard Animal Services at 321-633-2024.
- Support animal control in efforts to reduce feral and stray animal populations."
- 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 outdoor food sources such as uncovered trash 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.
- Persons who have been bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals should seek medical attention and report the injury to the DOH- Brevard at 321-634-6337

For further information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>, or contact DOH-Brevard at 321-634-6337

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