

# FERAL CATS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

A **feral cat** is: A domesticated cat that has returned to the wild, or the offspring of such a cat. It is distinguished from a *stray cat*, which is a pet cat that has been lost or abandoned. Only animal care professionals should handle stray/feral cats, as they can become quite dangerous when cornered.

Potential *zoonoses* transmitted by feral cats:

-  Rabies virus — *transmitted through bites*
-  Parasites — *transmitted through handling feces, i.e. Toxocara, Toxoplasma, Cryptosporidium, Campylobacter*
-  Cat Scratch Fever — *transmitted through bites/scratches*
-  Ringworm — *transmitted through contact/petting*

To prevent disease and to keep families healthy, you should:

-  Avoid contact with feral cats
-  Report any abnormal cats to the local Animal Services
-  Seek medical advice regarding any bites or scratches and report all
-  bites/scratches to the County Health Dept.
-  Unwanted pets should be taken to appropriate facilities rather than abandoned.
-  Wear gloves when gardening to prevent fecal-oral transmission
-  Covering litter boxes and practicing good personal hygiene, such as frequent
-  handwashing.

Populations particularly at risk for diseases transmitted by feral cats:

-  Children
-  Pregnant Women
-  Immunocompromised Individuals

The Florida Dept. of Health supports responsible pet ownership including good preventive/medical care and permanent ID with a registered microchip. Unwanted pets should be taken to appropriate facilities rather than abandoned.



## References:

Centers for Disease Control  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/cats.htm>

American Veterinary Medical Association  
[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

American Association of Feline Practitioners  
[www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)