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## WORLD RABIES DAY: AWARENESS IS THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST RABIES



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**Eustis, FL** – The world is again joining together on September 28 to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of rabies prevention. Rabies is the deadliest but preventable disease known to mankind, and the Florida Department of Health in Lake County (DOH-Lake) and Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Services are supporting World Rabies Day as part of the initiative.

Rabies prevention starts with the animal owner. Protect yourself, your pet and your community by taking animals to be vaccinated. Avoid stray animals and wildlife. If you are bitten, wash bite wounds with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately. If your pet is bitten, consult your veterinarian immediately. Prompt and appropriate treatment after being bitten and before the disease develops can stop rabies infection and/or prevent the disease in humans and animals.

"Through increased awareness, we can better educate our community on this preventable disease" says Aaron Kissler, Florida Department of Health Lake County Administrator.

It is estimated every year that 30,000-40,000 U.S. residents are potentially exposed to rabies. These exposures require human rabies post-exposure vaccinations. In Lake County, 64 animals tested positive for rabies over the past 12 years with most of these being raccoons.

The following are steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones against rabies:

- Keep rabies vaccination 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 Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Services at 352-343-9688.
- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Spray 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 always be reported to Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Services at 352-343-9688. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should call to report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as the Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Services and their local Health Department at 352-253-6130.

Additional information is available online at <http://lake.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/environmental-health/animal-bites-rabies/index.html>, <https://www.lcso.org/animalservices/> and <http://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day/> or by calling the Florida Department of Health in Lake County Environmental Health office at 352-253-6130.

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