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HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH WILD AND STRAY ANIMALS



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Eustis, FL– Lake County health officials urge residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure. In Florida, raccoons, bats, 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 cats, dogs and ferrets. Each year Lake County receives reports of rabid animals. In 2014 rabid animals including a raccoon, cat, fox and bat were reported in Lake County. A bat with exposure to people was reported in late September of 2015 in the South Lake High School area. Most recently, a rabid fox was reported in the northwest Minneola area.

“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 Aaron Kissler, Health Officer of the Florida Department of Health in Lake 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. The Florida Department of Health in Lake County works with Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Enforcement and Animal Shelter in responding to incidents of animal bites, tests animals for rabies through the Department of Health state laboratory, and quarantines animals as necessary. The Florida Department of Health in Lake County can also advise victims of animal bites where to obtain rabies vaccinations, 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.
- 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 Animal Enforcement at 352-343-2101.
- 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 be reported to Lake County Sheriff's Animal Enforcement at 352-343-2101 for handling. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should call to report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as Lake County Sheriff's Animal Enforcement and their local health department. The contact number to report an animal bite to DOH-Lake is 352-253-6130.

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