

April 11, 2016

SANTA ROSA COUNTY RESIDENTS ENCOURAGED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID ANIMAL BITES



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Milton, FL - The Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa County would like to remind everyone to take precautions to avoid animal bites after post-exposure rabies shots were recommended for four individuals who were bitten by stray cats and one person was exposed to a bat. None of the bites were related and occurred in different areas of the county. Residents and visitors should be aware that rabies is present in the wild animal population and domestic animals are at risk if not vaccinated.

Rabies is a disease that affects the brain. The virus is carried in the saliva of infected animals and is usually transmitted to people and other animals through a bite or scratch. Most cases of rabies occur in wild animals such as raccoons, foxes, skunks and bats, but domesticated animals can carry it as well. The disease is fatal to humans and animals, but rabies in humans can be prevented if rabies vaccine is administered as soon as possible after exposure. There are also vaccines to protect dogs, cats and other domesticated animals from contracting the disease.

An animal with rabies may appear sick or lethargic, have problems swallowing, or drool or salivate excessively. A wild animal may appear tamer than usual and some animals may have no visible symptoms at all.

The health department advises residents and visitors to take precautions to avoid exposing themselves or their pets to rabies:

- Avoid all contact with wild and unfamiliar domesticated animals.
- Never try to feed or pick up a stray dog or cat and do not approach wild animals.
- Children should also be taught not to approach wild animals or unfamiliar pets, even if they appear friendly.
- Do not place feeders in the yard – the food will attract unwanted animals such as raccoons, foxes and stray dogs and cats.
- Bring in pet food at night and secure trash cans with fasteners, or place trash containers in the garage.
- Do not leave pets outside unsupervised and do not allow them to roam free. If a pet is bitten, seek veterinary assistance immediately and contact Santa Rosa County Animal Services at 850-983-4680.
- Cover bird feeders. Most squirrel-proof coverings also deter wild animals.
- Vaccinate pets against rabies and keep their vaccinations up to date. Follow your veterinarian's recommendation for revaccination.
- Contact Animal Control to remove stray animals from your neighborhood.

If bitten, or scratched by a wild animal or stray domesticated animal, wash the wound immediately with soap and water. This is the first line of defense against rabies! Seek medical attention immediately and report the incident to the Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa

County at 850-983-5275 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. To report an animal bite after hours call 850-418-5566.

For more information on rabies, visit our website at <http://santarosa.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/environmental-health/rabies-surveillance/index.html> or the Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>.

About the Florida Department of Health

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