

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SANTA ROSA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES RABIES PRECAUTIONS

Milton, FL – The Santa Rosa County Health Department is urging residents to avoid contact with raccoons and other animals after two Santa Rosa County residents had contact with animals that may have had rabies. The individuals, who recently came into contact with raccoons, have been advised to receive the rabies vaccine. In one incident, the raccoon also had contact with a family pet that had to be euthanized because it had not been vaccinated against rabies.

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. Rabies is fatal to humans and animals, but rabies in humans can be prevented if rabies vaccine is administered as soon as possible after exposure. The cost of preventive vaccine for rabies is between \$1800 and \$2000.

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.

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

- Avoid all contact with wild and unfamiliar domesticated animals.
- Do not place feeders in the yard - the food will attract unwanted animals such as raccoons and foxes.
- 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.
- 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.

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 Santa Rosa County Health Department at (850) 983-5275 between the hours of 8:00a.m. and 5:00p.m. Monday through Friday, or after hours call (850) 418-5566.

For more information on rabies, contact the health department's Environmental Health Division at (850) 983-5275. If you see a suspicious animal in your yard or neighborhood, call animal control at (850) 983-4680. If a dead wild animal is on your property, contact the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission's regional office at (850) 265-3676, or their 24-hour law enforcement hotline at (888) 404-3922.

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