

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 16, 2011

CONTACT: Debbie Stilphen, PIO
(850) 983-5200, ext. 175

RABID RACCOON BITES DOG IN SANTA ROSA COUNTY

Milton, FL - The Santa Rosa County Health Department urges residents to avoid contact with wild animals after a case of rabies was confirmed in a raccoon that bit a dog. No humans were exposed, but the dog, which had not been vaccinated, will remain under quarantine for six months at a local vet's office, at the owner's expense.

Unvaccinated animals exposed to rabies are at high risk for developing the disease and would then pose a risk to humans and other animals. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that unvaccinated dogs, cats and ferrets exposed to a rabid animal should be euthanized or quarantined for a six month period to observe for symptoms of rabies. Dogs and cats with a current vaccination are kept under observation for 45 days if they have been exposed to rabies.

Rabies is a virus that affects the central nervous system (brain) and is carried in the saliva of infected animals. It 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. An animal suffering from 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.

Rabies is fatal in humans and animals, but vaccinating pets against rabies can help protect them against the virus. Florida law requires rabies vaccination for dogs, cats and ferrets.

The Santa Rosa County Health Department advises residents to take precautions to avoid exposing themselves, or their pets, to rabies:

- **Vaccinate pets against rabies and keep their vaccinations up to date.** Follow your veterinarian's recommendation for revaccination.
- 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.

If bitten or scratched by a wild animal or stray domesticated animal, wash the wound immediately with soap and water and seek medical attention. Report the bite to the Santa Rosa Animal Services by calling (850) 983-4680. After hours, call Epidemiology at (850) 418-5566. If you see a sickly animal in your yard or neighborhood, call Animal Services at (850) 983-4680.

###